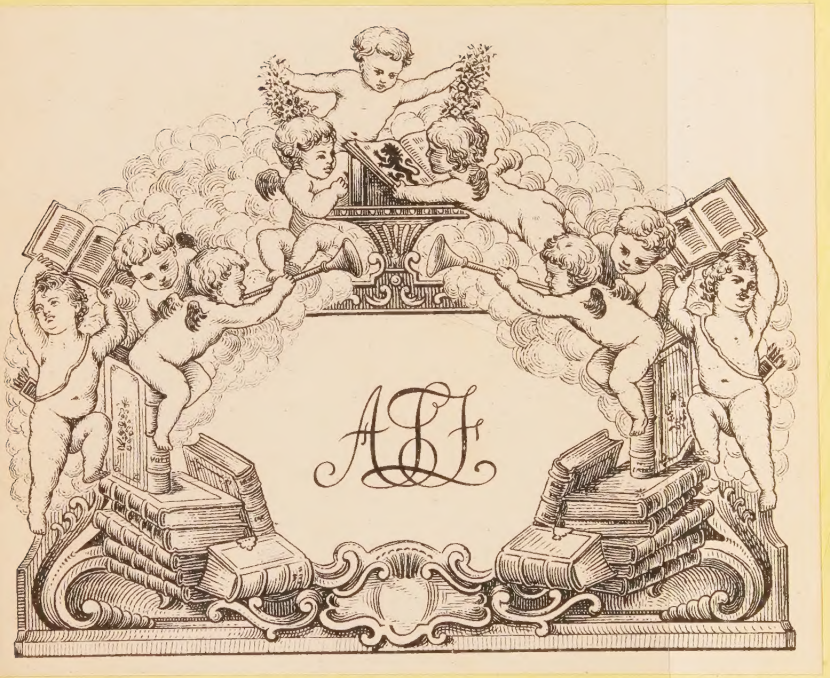
EREMA.

R. D. BLACKMORE.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EREMA

VOL. II.

EREMA

OR

MY FATHER'S SIN

BY

R. D. BLACKMORE

AUTHOR OF 'THE MAID OF SKER' ETC.

Κἀπὸ ματρὸς ἄφαρ βέβακεν
ὥστε πόρτις ἐρήμα—SOPH. *Trach.* 529

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

LONDON
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EREMA,

OR

MY FATHER'S SIN.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BETSY'S TALE.

Now I scarcely know whether it would be more clear to put into narrative what I heard from Betsy Bowen, now Wilhelmina Strouss, or to let her tell the whole in her own words, exactly as she herself told it then to me. The story was so dark and sad—or at least to myself it so appeared—that even the little breaks and turns of lighter thought or livelier manner, which could scarcely fail to vary now and then

the speaker's voice, seemed almost to grate and jar upon its sombre monotone. On the other hand, by omitting these, and departing from her homely style, I might do more of harm than good through failing to convey impressions, or even facts, so accurately. Whereas the gist, and core, and pivot of my father's life and fate are so involved (though not evolved), that I would not miss a single point for want of time or diligence. Therefore let me not deny Mrs. Strouss, my nurse, the right to put her words in her own way. And before she began to do this, she took the trouble to have everything cleared away, and the trays brought down, that her boarders (chiefly German) might leave their plates and be driven to their pipes.

'If you please, Miss Castlewood,' Mrs. Strouss said grandly, 'do you, or do you not, approve of the presence of "my man," as he calls himself?—an improper expression, in my opinion; such, however, is their nature. He can hold his tongue as well as any man, though none of them are very sure at that. And he

knows pretty nigh as much as I do, so far as his English can put things together, being better accustomed in German. For when we were courting I was fain to tell him all, not to join him under any false pretences, Miss, which might give him grounds against me.'

'Yes, yes, it is all vere goot and true—so goot and true as can be.'

'And you might find him come very handy, my dear, to run of any kind of messages. He can do that very well, I assure you, Miss—better than any Englishman.'

Seeing that he wished to stay, and that she desired it, I begged him to stop, though it would have been more to my liking to hear the tale alone.

'Then sit by the door, Hans, and keep off the draught,' said his Wilhelmina, kindly. 'He is not very tall, Miss, but he has good shoulders; I scarcely know what I should do without him. Well, now, to begin at the very beginning: I am a Welshwoman, as you may have heard. My father was a farmer near Abergavenny, holding land under Sir Watkin Williams,

an old friend of your family. My father had too many girls, and my mother scarcely knew what to do with the lot of us. So some of us went out to service, while the boys stayed at home to work the land. One of my sisters was lady's maid to Lady Williams, Sir Watkin's wife, at the time when your father came visiting there for the shooting of the moorfowl, soon after his marriage with your mother. What a sweet good lady your mother was! I never saw the like before or since. No sooner did I set eyes upon her, but she so took my fancy that I would have gone round the world with her. We Welsh are a very hot people, they say—not cold-blooded, as the English are. So, wise or foolish, right, wrong, or what might be, nothing would do for me but to take service, if I could, under Mrs. Castlewood. Your father was called Captain Castlewood then—as fine a young man as ever clinked a spur, but without any boast or conceit about him; and they said that your grandfather, the old lord, kept him very close and spare, although he was the only son. Now this must have

been—let me see, how long ago?—about five-and-twenty years, I think. How old are you now, Miss Erema? I can keep the weeks better than the years, Miss.'

'I was eighteen on my last birthday. But never mind about the time—go on.'

'But the time makes all the difference, Miss, although, at the time, we may never think so. Well, then, it must have been better than six-and-twenty year agone; for though you came pretty fast, in the Lord's will, there was eight years between you and the first-born babe, who was only just a-thinking of when I begin to tell. But to come back to myself, as was—mother had got too many of us still, and she was glad enough to let me go, however much she might cry over it, as soon as Lady Williams got me the place. My place was to wait upon the lady first, and make myself generally useful, as they say. But it was not very long before I was wanted in other more important ways, and having been brought up among so many children, they found me very handy with the little ones; and being in a poor way, as they were then—for people, I mean, of

their birth and place—they were glad enough soon to make head-nurse of me, although I was under two-and-twenty.

'We did not live at the old lord's place, which is under the hills looking on the river Thames; but we had a quiet little house in Hampshire; for the Captain was still with his regiment, and only came to and fro to us. But a happier little place there could not be, with the flowers, and the cow, and the birds all day, and the children running gradually according to their age, and the pretty brook shining in the valley. And as to the paying of their way, it is true that neither of them was a great manager. The Captain could not bear to keep his pretty wife close; and she, poor thing, was trying always to surprise him with other presents, besides all the beautiful babies. But they never were in debt all round, as the liars said when the trouble burst; and if they owed two or three hundred pounds, who could justly blame them?

'For the old lord, instead of going on as he should, and widening his purse to the number of the mouths, was niggling at them always for

offence or excuse, to take away what little he allowed them. The Captain had his pay, which would go in one hand, and the lady had a little money of her own; but still it was cruel for brought-up people to have nothing better to go on with. Not that the old lord was a miser neither; but it was said, and how far true I know not, that he never would forgive your father for marrying the daughter of a man he hated. And some went so far as to say that, if he could have done it, he would have cut your father out of all the old family estates. But such a thing never could I believe of a nobleman having his own flesh and blood.

'But, money or no money, rich or poor, your father and mother, I assure you, my dear, were as happy as the day was long. For they loved one another and their children dearly, and they did not care for any mixing with the world. The Captain had enough of that when put away in quarters; likewise his wife could do without it better and better at every birth, though once she had been the very gayest of the gay, which you never will be, Miss Erema.

'Now, my dear, you look so sad and so "solid," as we used to say, that if I can go on at all I must have something ready. I am quite an old nurse now, remember. Hans, go across the square, and turn on the left hand round the corner, and then three more streets towards the right, and you see one going towards the left, and you go about seven doors down it, and then you see a corner with a lamp-post.'

'Vilhelmina, I do see de lamp-post at de every corner.'

'That will teach you to look more bright, Hans. Then you find a shop window with three blue bottles, and a green one in the middle.'

'How can be any middle to three, without it is one of them?'

'Then let it be two of them. How you contradict me! Take this little bottle, and the man with a gold braid round a cap, and a tassel with a tail to it, will fill it for fourpence when you tell him who you are.'

'Yes, yes; I do now comprehend. You

send me vhere I never find de vay, because I am in de vay, Vilhelmina!'

I was most thankful to Mrs. Strouss for sending her husband (however good and kind-hearted he might be) to wander among many shops of chemists, rather than to keep his eyes on me, while I listened to things that were almost sure to make me want my eyes my own. My nurse had seen, as any good nurse must, that, grown and formed as I might be, the nature of the little child that cries for its mother was in me still.

'It is very sad now,' Mrs. Strouss began again, without replying to my grateful glance; 'Miss Erema, it is so sad that I wish I had never begun with it. But I see by your eyes—so like your father's, but softer, my dear, and less troublesome—that you will have the whole of it out, as he would with me once when I told him a story for the sake of another servant. It was just about a month before you were born, when the trouble began to break on us. And when once it began, it never stopped until all that were left ran away from it. I have

read in the newspapers many and many sad things coming over whole families, such as they call "shocking tragedies;" but none of them, to my mind, could be more galling than what I had to see with my very own eyes.

'It must have been close upon the middle of September when old Lord Castlewood came himself to see his son's house and family at Shoxford. We heard that he came down a little on the sudden, to see to the truth of some rumours which had reached him about our style of living. It was the first time he had ever been there; for, although he had very often been invited, he could not bear to be under the roof of the daughter, as he said, of his enemy. The Captain, just happening to come home on leave for his autumn holiday, met his father quite at his own door—the very last place to expect him. He afterwards acknowledged that he was not pleased for his father to come "like a thief in the night." However, they took him in and made him welcome, and covered up their feelings nicely, as the high-bred people do.

'What passed among them was unknown to any but themselves, except so far as now I tell you. A better dinner than usual for two was ready, to celebrate the master's return and the beginning of his holiday; and the old lord, having travelled far that day, was persuaded to sit down with them. The five eldest children (making all except the baby, for you was not born, Miss, if you please), they were to have sat up at table, as pretty as could be—three with their high-cushioned stools, and two in their arm-chairs screwed on mahogany, stuffed with horse-hair, and with rods in front, that the little dears might not tumble out in feeding—which they did; it was a sight to see them! And how they would give to one another, with their fingers wet and shining, and saying, "Oo, dat for oo." Oh dear, Miss Erema, you were never born to see it! What a blessing for you! All those six dear darlings laid in their little graves within six weeks, with their mother planted under them; and the only wonder is that you yourself was not upon her breast.

'Pay you no heed to me, Miss Erema, when

you see me a-whimpering in and out while I am about it. It makes my chest go easy, Miss, I do assure you, though not at the time of life to understand it. All they children was to have sat up for the sake of their dear father, as I said just now; but because of their grandfather all was ordered back. And back they come, as good as gold, with Master George at the head of them, and asked me what milk-teeth was. Grandpa had said that "a dinner was no dinner, if milk-teeth were allowed at it." The hard old man, with his own teeth false! He deserved to sit down to no other dinner—and he never did, Miss.

'You may be sure that I had enough to do to manage all the little ones and answer all their questions; but never having seen a live lord before, and wanting to know if the children would be like him before so very long, I went quietly downstairs, and the biggest of my dears peeped after me. And then, by favour of the parlour-maid—for they kept neither butler nor footman now—I saw the Lord Castlewood, sitting at his ease, with a glass of port wine

before him, and my sweet mistress (the Captain's wife, and your mother, if you understand, Miss) doing her very best, thinking of her children, to please him and make the polite to him. To me he seemed very much to be thawing to her —if you can understand, Miss, what my meaning is—and the Captain was looking at them with a smile, as if it were just what he had hoped for. From my own eyesight I can contradict the lies put about by nobody knows who, that the father and the son were at hot words even then.

'And I even heard my master, when they went out at the door, vainly persuading his father to take such a bed as they could offer him. And good enough it would have been for ten lords; for I saw nothing wonderful in him, nor fit to compare any way with the Captain. But he would not have it, for no other reason of ill-will or temper, but only because he had ordered his bed at the Moonstock Inn, where his coach-and-four were resting.

'"I expect you to call me in the morning, George," I heard him say, as clear as could be, while his son was helping his coat on. "I am

glad I have seen you. There are worse than you. And when the times get better, I will see what I can do."

'With him this meant more than it might have done; for he was not a man of much promises, as you might tell by his face almost, with his nose so stern, and his mouth screwed down, and the wrinkles the wrong way for smiling. I could not tell what the Captain answered, for the door banged on them, and it woke the baby, who was dreaming, perhaps, about his lordship's face, and his little teeth gave him the wind on his chest, and his lungs was like bellows —bless him!

'Well, that stopped me, Miss Erema, from being truly accurate in my testimony. What with walking the floor, and thumping his back, and rattling of the rings to please him—when they put me on the Testament, cruel as they did, with the lawyers' eyes eating into me, and both my ears buzzing with sorrow and fright, I may have gone too far, with my heart in my mouth, for my mind to keep out of contradiction, wishful as I was to tell the whole truth in a

manner to hurt nobody. And without any single lie or glaze of mine, I do assure you, Miss, that I did more harm than good; everybody in the room—a court they called it, and no bigger than my best parlour—one and all they were convinced that I would swear black was white, to save my master and mistress! And certainly I would have done so, and the Lord in heaven thought the better of me, for the sake of all they children, if I could have made it stick together, as they do with practice.'

At thought of the little good she had done, and perhaps the great mischief, through excess of zeal, Mrs. Strouss was obliged to stop, and put her hand to her side, and sigh. And eager as I was for every word of this miserable tale, no selfish eagerness could deny her need of refreshment, and even of rest; for her round cheeks were white, and her full breast trembled. And now she was beginning to make snatches at my hand, as if she saw things she could only tell thus.

CHAPTER XXIV.

BETSY'S TALE—*continued.*

'I AM only astonished, my dear,' said my nurse, as soon as she had had some tea and toast, and scarcely the soft roe of a red herring, 'that you can put up so well, and abide with my instincts in the way you do. None of your family could have done it, to my knowledge of their dispositions, much less the baby that was next above you. But it often comes about to go in turns like that; "one, three, five, and seven is sweet, while two, four, and six is a-squalling with their feet." But the Lord forgive me for an ill word of them, with their precious little bodies washed, and laying in their patterns till the judgment-day.

'But putting by the words I said in the dirty little room they pleased to call a "court," and the Testament so filthy that no lips could

have a hold of it, my meaning is to tell you, Miss, the very things that happened, so that you may fairly judge of them. The Captain came back from going with his father, I am sure in less than twenty minutes, and smoking a cigar in his elegant way, quite happy and contented, for I saw him down the staircase. As for sign of any haste about him, or wiping of his forehead, or fumbling with his handkerchief, or being in a stew in any sort of way—as the stupid cook who let him in declared, by reason of her own having been at the beer-barrel—solemnly, Miss, as I hope to go to heaven—there was nothing of the sort about him.

'He went into the dining-room, and mistress, who had been upstairs to see about the baby, went down to him; and there I heard them talking as pleasant and as natural as they always were together. Not one of them had the smallest sense of trouble hanging over them; and they put away both the decanters and cruets, and came up to bed in their proper order, the master stopping down just to finish

his cigar and see to the doors, and bringing up the silver, because there was no man-servant now. And I heard him laughing at some little joke he made as he went into the bedroom. A happier household never went to bed, nor one with better hopes of a happy time to come. And the baby slept beside his parents in his little cot, as his mother liked to have him, with his blessed mouth wide open.

'Now, we three (cook, and Susan, and myself) were accustomed to have a good time of it whenever the master first came home and the mistress was taken up with him. We used to count half an hour more in bed, without any of that wicked bell-clack, and then to go on to things according to their order, without anybody to say anything. Accordingly we were all snug in bed, and turning over for another tuck of sleep, when there came a most vicious ringing of the outer bell. "You get up, Susan," I heard the cook say, for there only was a door between us; and Susan said, "Blest if I will! Only Tuesday you put me down about it when the baker came." Not a peg would either of

them stir, no more than to call names on one another; so I slipped on my things, with the bell going clatter all the while, like the day of judgment. I felt it to be hard upon me, and I went down cross a little—just enough to give it well to a body I were not afraid of.

'But the Lord in his mercy remember me, Miss. When I opened the door I had no blood left. There stood two men, with a hurdle on their shoulders, and on the hurdle a body, with the head hanging down, and the front of it slouching, like a sack that has been stolen from. And behind it there was an authority with two buttons on his back, and he waited for me to say something; but to do so was beyond me. Not a bit of caution or of fear about my sham dress-up, as the bad folk put it afterward; the whole of such thoughts was beyond me outright, and no thought of anything came inside me, only to wait and wonder.

'"This corpse belongeth here, as I am informed," said the man, who seemed to be the master of it, and was proud to be so. "Young

woman, don't you please to stand like that, or every duffer in the parish will be here, and the boys that come hankering after it. You be off," he cried out to a boy who was calling some more round the corner. "Now, young woman, we must come in if you please, and the least said the soonest mended."

'"Oh! but my mistress, my mistress!" I cried, "and her time up, as nigh as may be, any day or night before new moon! Oh, Mr. Constable, Mr. Rural Polishman, take it to the tool-shed, if you ever had a wife, Sir." Now even this was turned against us as if I had expected it. They said that I must have known who it was, and to a certain length so I did, Miss; but only by the dress and the manner of the corpse, and lying with an attitude there was no contradicting.

'I cannot tell you now, my dear, exactly how things followed. My mind was gone all hollow with the sudden shock upon it. However, I had thought enough to make no noise immediate, nor tell the other foolish girls, who would have set up bellowing. Having years to

deal with little ones brings knowledge of the rest to us. I think that I must have gone to master's door, where Susan's orders were to put his shaving water in a tin, and fetched him out, with no disturbance, only in his dressing-gown. And when I told him what it was, his rosy colour turned like sheets, and he just said "Hush!" and nothing more. And, guessing what he meant, I ran and put my things on properly.

'But having time to think, the shock began to work upon me; and I was fit for nothing when I saw the children smiling up with their tongues out for their bread and milk, as they used to begin the day with. And I do assure you, Miss Erema, my bitterest thought was of your coming, though unknown whether male or female, but both most inconvenient then, with things in such a state of things. You have much to answer for, Miss, about it; but how was you to help it though?

'The tool-shed door was too narrow to let the hurdle and the body in, and finding some large seakale pots standing out of use against

the door, the two men (who were tired with the weight and fright, I dare say) set down their burden upon these, under a row of hollyhocks, at the end of the row of beehives. And here they wiped their foreheads with some rags they had for handkerchiefs, or one of them with his own sleeve, I should say, and, gaining their breath, they began to talk with the boldness of the sunrise over them. But Mr. Rural Polishman, as he was called in those parts, was walking up and down on guard, and despising of their foolish words.

'My master, the Captain, your father, Miss, came out of a window and down the cross walk, while I was at the green door peeping, for I thought that I might be wanted, if only to take orders what was to be done inside. The constable stiffly touched his hat, and marched to the head of the hurdle, and said—

'"Do you know this gentleman?"

'Your father took no more notice of him than if he had been a stiff hollyhock, which he might have resembled if he had been good-looking. The Captain thought highly of dis-

cipline always, and no kinder gentleman could there be to those who gave his dues to him. But that man's voice had a low and dirty impertinent sort of a twang with it. Nothing could have been more unlucky. Everything depended on that fellow in an ignorant neighbourhood like that; and his lordship, for such he was now, of course, would not even deign to answer him. He stood over his head in his upright way by a good foot, and ordered him here and there, as the fellow had been expecting, I do believe, to order his lordship. And that made the bitterest enemy of him, being newly sent into these parts, and puffed up with authority. And the two miller's men could not help grinning, for he had waved them about like a pair of dogs.

'But to suppose that my master "was unmoved, and took it brutally" (as that wretch of a fellow swore afterwards), only shows what a stuck-up dolt he was. For when my master had examined his father, and made his poor body be brought in and spread on the couch in the dining-room, and sent me hot-foot for

old Dr. Diggory down at the bottom of Shoxford, Susan peeped in through the crack of the door, with the cook to hold her hand behind, and there she saw the captain on his knees at the side of his father's corpse, not saying a word, only with his head down. And when the doctor came back with me, with his night-gown positive under his coat, the first thing he said was, "My dear Sir—my lord, I mean—don't take on so; such things will always happen in this world;" which shows that my master was no brute.

'Then the Captain stood up in his strength and height, without any pride and without any shame, only in the power of a simple heart, and he said words fit to hang him—

'"This is my doing! There is no one else to blame. If my father is dead, I have killed him!"

'Several of us now were looking in, and the news going out like a winnowing woman with no one to shut the door after her; our passage was crowding with people that should have had a tar-brush in their faces.

And of course a good score of them ran away to tell that the Captain had murdered his father. The milkman stood there with his yoke and cans, and his naily boots on our new oilcloth, and, not being able to hide himself plainly, he pulled out his slate and began to make his bill.

'"Away with you all!" your father said, coming suddenly out of the dining-room, while the doctor was unbuttoning my lord, who was dead with all his day clothes on; and everybody brushed away like flies at the depth of his voice and his stature. Then he bolted the door, with only our own people, and the doctor, and the constable inside. Your mother was sleeping like a lamb, as I could swear, having had a very tiring day the day before, and being well away from the noise of the passage, as well as at a time when they must sleep, whenever sleep will come, Miss. Bless her gentle heart, what a blessing to be out of all that scare of it!

'All this time, you must understand, there was no sign yet what had happened to his lordship, over and above his being dead. All of us thought, if our minds made bold to think,

that it must have pleased the Lord to take his lordship, either with an appleplexy, or a sudden heart-stroke, or, at any rate, some other gracious way not having any flow of blood in it. But now, while your father was gone upstairs—for he knew that his father was dead enough—to be sure that your mother was quiet, and perhaps to smooth her down for trouble, and while I was run away to stop the ranting of the children, old Dr. Diggory and that rural officer were handling poor Lord Castlewood. They set him to their liking, and they cut his clothes off—so Susan told me afterwards—and then they found why they were forced to do so, which I need not try to tell you, Miss. Only they found that he was not dead from any wise visitation, but because he had been shot with a bullet through his heart.

'Old Dr. Diggory came out shaking, and without any wholesome sense to meet what had arisen, after all his practice with dead men, and he called out "Murder!" with a long thing in his hand, till my master leaped down the stairs, twelve at a time, and laid his strong hand on the old fool's mouth.

'"Would you kill my wife?" he said; "you shall not kill my wife."

'"Captain Castlewood," the constable answered, pulling out his staff importantly, "consider yourself my prisoner."

'The Captain could have throttled him with one hand, and Susan thought he would have done it. But instead of that he said, "Very well; do your duty. But let me see what you mean by it." Then he walked back again to the body of his father, and saw that he had been murdered.

'But oh, Miss Erema, you are so pale! Not a bit of food have you had for hours. I ought not to have told you such a deal of it to once. Let me undo all your things, my dear, and give you something cordial; and then lie down, and sleep a bit.'

'No, thank you, nurse,' I answered, calling all my little courage back. 'No sleep for me until I know every word. And to think of all my father had to see and bear! I am not fit to be his daughter.'

CHAPTER XXV.

BETSY'S TALE—*concluded.*

'WELL, now,' continued Mrs. Strouss, as soon as I could persuade her to go on; 'if I were to tell you every little thing that went on among them, Miss, I should go on from this to this day week, or I might say this day fortnight, and then not half be done with it. And the worst of it is that those little things make all the odds in a case of that sort, showing what the great things were. But only a counsellor at the Old Bailey could make head or tail of the goings on that followed.

'For some reason of his own, unknown to any living being but himself, whether it were pride (as I always said) or something deeper (as other people thought), he refused to have any one on earth to help him, when he ought to have had the deepest lawyer to be found. The

constable cautioned him to say nothing, as it seems is laid down in their orders, for fear of crimination. And he smiled at this, with a high contempt, very fine to see, but not bodily wise. But even that jack-in-office could perceive that the poor Captain thought of his sick wife upstairs, and his little children, ten times for one thought he ever gave to his own position. And yet I must tell you that he would have no denial, but to know what it was that had killed his parent. When old Dr. Diggory's hands were shaking, so that his instrument would not bite on the thing lodged in his lordship's back, after passing through and through him, and he was calling for somebody to run for his assistant, who do you think did it for him, Miss Erema? As sure as I sit here, the Captain! His face was like a rock, and his hands no less; and he said, "Allow me, doctor. I have been in action." And he fetched out the bullet—which showed awful nerve, according to my way of thinking—as if he had been a man with three rows of teeth.

'"This bullet is just like those of my own

pistol!" he cried, and he sat down hard with amazement. You may suppose how this went against him, when all he desired was to know and tell the truth; and people said that "of course he got it out, after a bottleful of doctors failed, because he knew best how it was put in."

'"I shall now go and see the place, if you please, or whether you please or not," my master said. "Constable, you may come and point it out, unless you prefer going to your breakfast. My word is enough, that I shall not run away. Otherwise, as you have acted on your own authority, I shall act on mine, and tie you until you have obtained a warrant. Take your choice, my man; and make it quickly, while I offer it."

'The rural polishman stared at this, being used on the other hand to be made much of. But, seeing how capable the Captain was of acting up to anything, he made a sulky scrape, and said "Sir, as you please for the present," weighting his voice on those last three words, as much as to say, "Pretty soon you will be

handcuffed." "Then," said my master, "I shall also insist on the presence of two persons, simply to use their eyes without any fear or favour. One is my gardener, a very honest man, but apt to be late in the morning. The other is a faithful servant, who has been with us for several years. Their names are Jacob Rigg and Betsy Bowen. You may also bring two witnesses, if you choose. And the miller's men of course will come. But order back all others."

'"That is perfectly fair and straight-forward, my lord," the constable answered, falling naturally into abeyance to orders. "I am sure that all of us wishes your lordship kindly out of this rum scrape. But my duty is my duty."

'With a few more words we all set forth, six in number, and no more; for the constable said that the miller's men, who had first found the late Lord Castlewood, were witnesses enough for him. And Jacob Rigg, whose legs were far apart (as he said) from trenching celery, took us through the kitchen garden, and out at a gap, which saved everybody knowing.

'Then we passed through a copse or two, and across a meadow, and then along the turnpike-road, as far as now I can remember. And along that we went to a stile on the right, without any house for a long way off. And from that stile a footpath led down a slope of grassland to the little river, and over a hand-bridge, and up another meadow full of trees and bushes, to a gate which came out into the road again, a little to this side of the Moonstock Inn, saving a quarter of a mile of road, which ran straight up the valley and turned square at the stone bridge to get to the same inn.

'I cannot expect to be clear to you, Miss, though I see it all now as I saw it then, every tree, and hump, and hedge of it; only about the distances, from this to that, and that to the other, they would be beyond me. You must be on the place itself; and I never could carry distances—no, nor even clever men, I have heard my master say. But when he came to that stile he stopped, and turned upon all of us clearly, and as straight as any man of men could be. "Here I saw my father last, at a

quarter past ten o'clock last night, or within a few minutes of that time. I wished to see him to his inn, but he would not let me do so, and he never bore contradiction. He said that he knew the way well, having fished more than thirty years ago, up and down this stream. He crossed this stile, and we shook hands over it, and the moon being bright, I looked into his face, and he said, "My boy, God bless you!" Knowing his short ways, I did not even look after him, but turned away, and went straight home along this road. Upon my word as an Englishman, and an officer of Her Majesty, that is all I know of it. Now let us go on to the— to the other place.'

'We all of us knew in our hearts, I am sure, that the Captain spoke the simple truth, and his face was grand as he looked at us. But the constable thought it his duty to ask—

'"Did you hear no sound of a shot, my lord? For he fell within a hundred yards of this."

'"I heard no sound of any shot whatever. I heard an owl hooting, as I went home, and then the rattle of a heavy waggon, and the

bells of horses. I have said enough. Let us go forward."

'We obeyed him at once; and even the constable looked right and left, as if he had been wrong. He signed to the miller's man to lead the way, and my lord walked proudly after him. The path was only a little narrow track, with the grass, like a front of hair, falling over it on the upper side, and on the under, dropping away like side curls; such a little path that I was wondering how a great lord could walk over it. Then we came down a steep place to a narrow bridge across a shallow river; a bridge made of only two planks and a rail, with a prop or two to carry them. And one end of the hand-rail was fastened into a hollow and stubby old hawthorn tree, overhanging the bridge and the water a good way. And just above this tree, and under its shadow, there came a dry cut into the little river, not more than a yard or two above the wooden bridge, a water-trough such as we have in Wales, Miss, for the water to run in when the farmer pleases; but now there was no water in it, only gravel.

'The cleverest of the miller's men, though neither of them had much intellect, stepped down at a beck from the constable, right beneath the old ancient tree, and showed us the marks on the grass and the gravel made by his lordship where he fell and lay. And it seemed that he must have fallen off the bridge, yet not into the water, but so as to have room for his body, if you see, Miss, partly on the bank, and partly in the hollow of the meadow-trough.

'"Have you searched the place well?" the Captain asked; "have you found any weapon or implement?"

'"We have found nothing but the corpse, so far," the constable answered in a surly voice, not liking to be taught his business. "My first duty was to save life, if I could. These men, upon finding the body, ran for me, and knowing who it was, I came with it to your house."

'"You acted for the best, my man. Now search the place carefully, while I stand here. I am on my parole, I shall not run away. Jacob, go down and help them."

'Whether from being in the army, or what, your father always spoke in such a way that the most stiff-neckedest people began without thinking to obey him. So the constable and the rest went down, while the captain and I stood upon the plank, looking at the four of them.

'For a long time they looked about, according to their attitudes, without finding anything more than the signs of the manner in which the poor lord fell, and of these the constable pulled out a book and made a pencil memorial. But presently Jacob, a spry sort of man, cried, "Hulloa! whatever have I got hold of here? Many a good crawfish have I pulled out from this bank, when the water comes down the gully; but never one exactly like this here afore."

'"Name of the Lord!" cried the constable, jumping behind the hawthorn-stump; don't point it at me, you looby! It's loaded, loaded one barrel, don't you see? Put it down, with the muzzle away from me.'

'"Hand it to me, Jacob," the Captain said; "you understand a gun, and this goes off just

the same. Constable Jobbins, have no fear. Yes, it is exactly as I thought. This pistol is one of the double-barrelled pair which I bought to take to India. The barrels are rifled; it shoots as true as any rifle, and almost as hard up to fifty yards. The right barrel has been fired, the other still is loaded. The bullet I took from my father's body most certainly came from this pistol."

'"Can 'e say, can 'e say then, who done it, master?" asked Jacob, a man very sparing of speech, but ready at a beck to jump at constable and miller's men, if only law was with him. "Can 'e give a clear account, and let me chuck 'un in the river?"

'"No, Jacob, I can do nothing of the kind," your father answered; while the Rural man came up and faced things, not being afraid of a fight half so much as he was of an accident; by reason of his own mother having been blown up by a gunpowder start at Dartford, yet came down all right, Miss, and had him three months afterward, according to his own confession; nevertheless, he came up now, as if he had

always been upright in the world, and he said, "My lord, can you explain all this?"

'Your father looked at him, with one of his strange gazes; as if he were measuring the man, while trying his own inward doing of his own mind. Proud as your father was, as proud as ever can be without cruelty, it is my firm belief, Miss Erema, going on a woman's judgment, that if the man's eyes had come up to my master's sense of what was virtuous, my master would have up and told him the depth and contents of his mind and heart; although totally gone beyond him.

'But Jobbins looked back at my lord with a grin, and his little eyes, hard to put up with. "Have you nothing to say, my lord? Then I am afeared I must ask you just to come along of me." And my master went with him, Miss, as quiet as a lamb; which Jobbins said, and even Jacob fancied, was a conscious sign of guilt.

'Now, after I have told you all this, Miss Erema, you know very nearly as much as I do. To tell how the grief was broken to your mother, and what her state of mind was, and

how she sat up on the pillows and cried, while things went on from bad to worse, and a verdict of "wilful murder" was brought against your father by the crowner's men, and you come headlong, without so much as the birds in the ivy to chirp about you, right into the thick of the worst of it. I do assure you, Miss Erema, when I look at your bright eyes and clear figure, the Lord in heaven, who has made many cripples, must have looked down special, to have brought you as you are. For trouble upon trouble fell in heaps, faster than I can wipe my eyes to think. To begin with, all the servants but myself, and gardener Jacob, ran away. They said that the old lord haunted the house, and walked with his hand in the middle of his heart, pulling out a bullet, if he met anybody, and sighing "murder" three times, till every hair was crawling. I took it on myself to fetch the Vicar of the parish, to lay the evil spirit, as they do in Wales. A nice kind gentleman he was as you could see, and wore a velvet skull-cap, and waited with his legs up. But whether he felt that the power was not in him, or

whether his old lordship was frightened of the Church, they never made any opportunity between them, to meet and have it out, Miss.

'Then it seemed as if Heaven, to avenge his lordship, rained down pestilence upon that house. A horrible disease, the worst I ever met, broke out upon the little harmless dears, the pride of my heart and of everybody's eyes, for lovelier or better ones never came from heaven. They was all gone to heaven in a fortnight and three days, and laid in the churchyard at one another's side, with little beds of mould to the measure of their stature, and their little carts and drums, as they made me promise, ready for the judgment day. Oh, my heart was broken, Miss, my heart was broken; I cried so, I thought I could never cry more.

'But when your dear mother, who knew nothing of all this (for we put all their illness, by the doctor's orders, away at the further end of the house), when she was a little better of grievous pain and misery (for being so upset, her time was hard), when she sat up on the pillow, looking like a bride almost, except that

she had what brides hasn't, a little red thing in white flannel at her side, then she says to me, "I am ready, Betsy; it is high time for all of them to see their little sister. They always love the baby so, whenever there is a new one. And they are such men and women to it. They have been so good this time, that I have never heard them once. And I am sure that I can trust them, Betsy, not to make the baby cry. I do so long to see the darlings. Now do not even whisper to them not to make a noise. They are too good to require it; and it would hurt their little feelings.'

'I had better have been shot, my dear, according as the old lord was, than have the pain that went through all my heart, to see the mother so. She sat up, leaning on one arm, with the hand of the other round your little head, and her beautiful hair was come out of its loops, and the colour in her cheeks was like a shell. Past the fringe of the curtain, and behind it too, her soft bright eyes were a-looking here and there, for the first to come in of her children. The Lord only knows what lies I told

her, so as to be satisfied without them. First I said they were all gone for a walk; and then that the doctor had ordered them away, and then that they had got the measles. That last she believed, because it was worse than what I had said before of them; and she begged to see Dr. Diggory about it, and I promised that she should as soon as he had done his dinner. And then, with a little sigh, being very weak, she went down into her nest again, with only you to keep her company.

'Well, that was bad enough, as any mortal sufferer might have said; enough for one day at any rate. But there was almost worse to come. For when I was having a little sit down-stairs, with my supper, and half-pint of ale (that comes like drawing a long breath to us, when spared out of sick-rooms, Miss), and having no nursery now on my mind, was thinking of all the sad business, with only a little girl in the back-kitchen, come in to muck up the dishes, there appeared a good knock at the garden-door, and I knew it for the thumb of the Captain. I locked the young girl up, by

knowing what their tongues are, and then I let your father in, and the candle sight of him made my heart go low.

'He had come out of prison; and although not being tried, his clothes were still in decency, they had great holes in them, and the gloss all gone to a smell of mere hedges and ditches. The hat on his head was quite out of the fashion, even if it could be called a hat at all, and his beautiful beard had no sign of a comb, and he looked as old again as he had looked a month ago.

'"I know all about it. You need not be afraid," he said, as I took him to the breakfast-room, where no one upstairs could hear us. 'I know that my children are all dead and buried, except the one that was not born yet. Ill news flies quick. I know all about it. George, Henrietta, Jack, Alf., little Vi, and Tiny. I have seen their graves and counted them, while the fool of a policeman beat his gloves through the hedge, within a rod of me. Oh yes, I have much to be thankful for. My life is in my own hand now."

'"Oh, master; oh, captain; oh my lord!" I

cried; "for the sake of God in heaven, don't talk like that. Think of your sweet wife, your dear lady."

'"Betsy," he answered, with his eyes full upon me, noble, yet frightful to look at; "I am come to see my wife. Go and let her know it, according to your own discretion."

'My discretion would have been not to let him see her, but go on and write to her from foreign countries, with the salt sea between them; but I give you my word that I had no discretion, but from pity and majesty obeyed him. I knew that he must have broken prison, and by good rights ought to be starving. But I could no more offer him the cold ham and pullet, than take him by his beard and shake him.

'"Is he come, at last, at last?" my poor mistress said, whose wits were wandering after her children. "At last, at last! then he will find them all."

'"Yes, ma'am, at last, at the last he will," I answered, while I thought of the burial service, which I had heard three times in a week, for the little ones went to their graves in pairs to

save ceremony; likewise of the Epistle of Saint Paul, which is not like our Lord's way of talking at all, but arguing instead of comforting; and not to catch her up in that weak state, I said, "He will find every one of them, ma'am!"

'"Oh, but I want him for himself, for himself, as much as all the rest put together," my dear lady said, without listening to me, but putting her hand to her ear to hearken for even so much as a mouse on the stairs; do bring him, Betsy; only bring him, Betsy, and then let me go where my children are!"

'I was surprised at her manner of speaking, which I would not have allowed to her, but more than all about her children, which she could only have been dreaming yet, for nobody else came nigh her except only me, Miss, and you, Miss, and for you to breathe words was impossible. All you did was to lie very quiet, tucked up into your mother's side, and as regular as the timepiece went, wide came your eyes and your mouth to be fed. If your nature had been cross or squally, "baby's coffin No. 7" would have come after all the other

six, which the thief of a carpenter put down on his bill, as if it was so many shavings.

'Well now, to tell you the downright truth, I have a lot of work to do to-morrow, Miss, with three basketfuls of washing coming home, and a man about a tap that leaks and floods the inside of the fender; and if I were to try to put before you the way that those two for the last time of their lives went on to one another, the one like a man and the other like a woman, full of sobs and choking—my eyes would be in such a state to-morrow that the whole of them would pity and cheat me. And I ought to think of you as well, Miss, who has been sadly harrowed listening when you was not born yet. And to hear what went on, full of weeping, when yourself was in the world, and able to cry for yourself, and all done over your own little self, would leave you red eyes and no spirit for the night, and no appetite in the morning; and so I will pass it all over, if you please, and let him go out of the back door again.

'This he was obliged to do quick, and no mistake, glad as he might have been to say

more words, because the fellows who call themselves officers, without any commission, were after him. False it was to say, as was said, that he got out of Winchester gaol through money. That story was quite of a piece with the rest. His own strength and skill it was that brought him out triumphantly, as the scratches on his hands and cheeks might show. He did it for the sake of his wife, no doubt. When he heard that the children were all in their graves, and their mother in the way to follow them, madness was better than his state of mind, as the officers told me when they could not catch him, and sorry they would have been to do it, I believe.

'To overhear my betters is the thing of all things most against my nature, and my poor lady being unfit to get up, there was nothing said on the landing, which is the weakest part of gentlefolks. They must have said "Goodbye" to one another quite in silence, and the Captain, as firm a man as ever lived, had lines on his face that were waiting for tears, if nature should overcome bringing up. Then I heard

the words "for my sake," and the other said "for your sake," a pledge that passed between them, making breath more long than life is. But when your poor father was by the back door, going out towards the woods and coppices, he turned sharp round and he said, "Betsy Bowen!" and I answered, "Yes, at your service, Sir!" "You have been the best woman in the world," he said, "the bravest, best, and kindest. I leave my wife and my last child to you. The Lord has been hard on me, but He will spare me those two; I do hope, and believe, He will."

'We heard a noise of horses in the valley, and the clank of swords; no doubt the mounted police from Winchester a-crossing of the Moonstock Bridge to search our house for the runaway. And the Captain took my hand and said, "I trust them to you! Hide the clothes I took off, that they may not know I have been here. I trust my wife and little babe to you, and may God bless you, Betsy."

'He had changed all his clothes, and he looked very nice, but a sadder face was never seen. As he slipped through the hollyhocks I

said to myself, "There goes a broken-hearted man, and he leaves a broken heart behind." And your dear mother died on the Saturday night. Oh, my! Oh, my! How sad it was!'

CHAPTER XXVI.

AT THE BANK.

In telling that sad tale my faithful and soft-hearted nurse had often proved her own mistake in saying, as she did, that tears can ever be exhausted. And I, for my part, though I could scarcely cry for eager listening, was worse off perhaps than if I had wetted each sad fact as it went by. At any rate, be it this way or that, a heavy and sore heart was left me, too distracted for asking questions, and almost too depressed to grieve.

In the morning Mrs. Strouss was bustling here and there and everywhere, and to look at her nice Welsh cheeks and aprons, and to hear how she scolded the butcher's boy, nobody would for a moment believe that her heart was deeper than her skin, as the saying of the west country is. Major Hockin had been to see me

last night, for he never forgot a promise, and had left me in good hands, and now he came again in the morning. According to his usual way of taking up an opinion, he would not see how distracted I was, and full of what I had heard overnight, but insisted on dragging me off to the Bank, that being in his opinion of more importance than old stories. I longed to ask Betsy some questions which had been crowding into my mind as she spoke, and while I lay awake at night; however, I was obliged to yield to the business of the morning, and the good Major's zeal and keen knowledge of the world; and he really gave me no time to think.

'Yes, I understand all that well as if I had heard every word of it,' he said, when he had led me helpless into the Hansom cab he came in, and had slammed down the floodgates in front of us. 'You must never think twice of what old women say' (Mrs. Strouss was some twenty years younger than himself), 'they always go prating, and finding mare's-nests, and then they always cry. Now, did she cry, Erema?'

I would have given a hundred dollars to be able to say, 'No, not one drop,' but the truth was against me, and I said, 'How could she help it?'

'Exactly!' the Major exclaimed, so loudly that the cabman thought he was ordered to stop; 'no, go on, cabby, if your horse can do it. My dear, I beg your pardon, but you are so very simple! You have not been among the eye-openers of the west. This comes of the obsolete Uncle Sam.'

'I would rather be simple than "cute!"' I replied, 'and my own Uncle Sam will be never obsolete.'

Silly as I was, I could never speak of the true Uncle Sam in this far country without the bright shame of a glimmer in my eyes, and with this, which I cared not to hide, I took my companion's hand, and stood upon the footway of a narrow and crowded lane.

'Move on, move on!' cried a man, with a high-crowned hat japanned at intervals, and, wondering at his rudeness to a lady, I looked at him. But he only said, 'Now, move on, will

you?' without any wrath, and as if he were vexed at our littleness of mind in standing still. Nobody heeded him any more than if he had said, 'I am starving,' but it seemed a rude thing among ladies. Before I had time to think more about this—for I always like to think of things—I was led through a pair of narrow swinging doors, and down a close alley between two counters full of people paying and receiving money. The Major, who always knew how to get on, found a white-haired gentleman in a very dingy corner, and whispered to him in a confidential way, though neither had ever seen the other before, and the white-haired gentleman gazed at me as sternly as if I were a bank-note for at least a thousand pounds; and then he said, 'Step this way, young lady. Major Hockin, step this way, sir.'

The young lady 'stepped that way' in wonder as to what English English is, and then we were shown into a sacred little room, where the daylight had glass reflectors for it, if it ever came to use them. But as it cared very little to do this, from angular disabilities, three bright

gas-lights were burning in soft covers, and fed the little room with a rich, sweet glow. And here shone one of the partners of the bank, a very pleasant-looking gentleman, and very nicely dressed.

'Major Hockin,' he said, after looking at the card, 'will you kindly sit down, while I make one memorandum? I had the pleasure of knowing your uncle well; at least, I believe that the late Sir Rufus was your uncle?'

'Not so,' replied the Major, well pleased, however. 'I fear that I am too old to have had any uncle lately. Sir Rufus Hockin was my first cousin.'

'Oh, indeed! To be sure, I should have known it, but Sir Rufus being much your senior, the mistake was only natural. Now what can I do to serve you, or perhaps this young lady—Miss Hockin, I presume?'

'No,' said his visitor, 'not Miss Hockin. I ought to have introduced her, but for having to make my own introduction. Mr. Shovelin, this lady is Miss Erema Castlewood, the only surviving child of the late Captain George

Castlewood—properly speaking, Lord Castlewood.'

Mr. Shovelin had been looking at me with as much curiosity as good manners and his own particular courtesy allowed. And I fancied that he felt that I could not be a Hockin.

'Oh dear, dear me!' was all he said, though he wanted to say, 'God bless me!' or something more sudden and stronger. 'Lord Castlewood's daughter—poor George Castlewood! My dear young lady, is it possible?'

'Yes, I am my father's child,' I said, 'and I am proud to hear that I am like him.'

'That you well may be,' he answered, putting on his spectacles. 'You are astonished at my freedom, perhaps; you will allow for it, or, at least, you will not be angry with me when you know that your father was my dearest friend at Harrow; and that when his great trouble fell upon him——'

Here Mr. Shovelin stopped, as behoves a man who begins to outrun himself. He could not tell me that it was himself who had found all the money for my father's escape, which

cost much cash as well as much good feeling. Neither did I, at the time, suspect it, being all in the dark upon such points. Not knowing what to say, I looked from the Banker to the Major, and back again.

'Can you tell me the exact time?' the latter asked. 'I am due in the Temple at 12.30, and I never am a minute late, whatever happens.'

'You will want a swift horse,' Mr. Shovelin answered, 'or else this will be an exception to your rule. It is twenty-one minutes past twelve now.'

'May I leave my charge to you then, for a while? She will be very quiet; she is always so. Erema, will you wait for me?'

I was not quick enough then to see that this was arranged between them. Major Hockin perceived that Mr. Shovelin wished to have a talk with me about dearer matters than money, having children of his own, and being (as his eyes and forehead showed) a man of peculiar views perhaps, but clearly of general good will.

'In an hour, in an hour, in less than an hour,' the Major intensified his intentions

always, 'in three-quarters of an hour I shall be back. Meanwhile, my dear, you will sit upon a stool, and not say a word, nor make any attempt to do anything everybody is not used to.'

This vexed me, as if I were a savage here; and I only replied with a very gentle bow, being glad to see his departure; for Major Hockin was one of those people so often to be met with, whom any one likes or dislikes according to the changes of their behaviour. But Mr. Shovelin was different from that.

'Miss Castlewood, take this chair,' he said; 'a hard one, but better than a stool, perhaps. Now, how am I to talk to you; as an inquirer upon business matters, or as the daughter of my old friend? Your smile is enough. Well, and you must talk to me in the same unreasonable manner. That being clearly established between us, let us proceed to the next point. Your father, my old friend, wandered from the track, and unfortunately lost his life in a desolate part of America.'

'No; oh no. It was nothing like that. He might have been alive, and here at this moment,

if I had not drunk and eaten every bit and drop of his.'

'Now don't, my dear child, don't be so romantic—I mean, look at things more soberly. You did as you were ordered, I have no doubt; George Castlewood always would have that. He was a most commanding man. You do not quite resemble him in that respect, I think.'

'Oh, but did he do it, did he do it?' I cried out. 'You were at school with him, and knew his nature. Was it possible for him to do it, Sir?'

'As possible as it is for me to go down to Sevenoaks and shoot my dear old mother, who is spending a green and agreeable old age there. Not that your grandfather, if I may say it without causing pain to you, was either green or agreeable. He was an uncommonly sharp old man, I might even say a hard one. As you never saw him, you will not think me rude in saying that much. Your love, of course, is for your father; and if your father had had a father of larger spirit about money, he might have been talking to me pleasantly now, instead of—instead of all these sad things.'

'Please not to slip away from me,' I said bluntly, having so often met with that; 'you believe, as every good person does, that my father was wholly innocent? But do tell me who could have done it instead. Somebody must have done it; that seems clear.'

'Yes,' replied Mr. Shovelin, with a look of calm consideration; 'somebody did it, undoubtedly; and that makes the difficulty of the whole affair. "Cui bono?" as the lawyers say. Two persons only could have had any motive, so far as wealth and fortune go. The first, and most prominent, your father, who, of course, would come into everything (which made the suspicion so hot and strong); and the other, a very nice gentleman, whom it is wholly impossible to suspect.'

'Are you sure of that? People have more than suspected, they have condemned, my father. After that, I can suspect anybody. Who is it? Please to tell me.'

'It is the present Lord Castlewood, as he is beginning to be called. He would not claim the title, or even put forward his right in any

way, until he had proof of your dear father's death; and even then he behaved so well——'

'He did it; he did it!' I cried in hot triumph. 'My father's name shall be clear of it. Can there be any doubt that he did it? How very simple the whole of it becomes! Nothing astonishes me, except the stupidity of people. He had everything to gain, and nothing to lose—a bad man, no doubt—though I never heard of him. And putting it all on my father, of course, to come in himself, and abide his time, till the misery killed my father. How simple, how horribly simple it becomes!'

'You are much too quick, too hot, too sudden. Excuse me a minute'—as a silver bell struck—'I am wanted in the next room. But before I go, let me give you a glass of cold water, and beg you to dismiss that new idea from your mind.'

I could see, as I took with a trembling hand the water he poured out for me, that Mr. Shovelin was displeased. His kind and handsome face grew hard. He had taken me for a nice young lady, never much above the freezing

point, and he had found me boil over in a moment. I was sorry to have grieved him; but if he had heard Betsy Bowen's story, and seen her tell it, perhaps he would have allowed for me. I sat down again, having risen in my warmth, and tried to quiet and command myself by thinking of the sad points only. Of these there were plenty to make pictures of, the like of which had kept me awake all night; and I knew by this time, from finding so much more of pity than real sympathy, that men think a woman may well be all tears, but has no right to even the shadow of a frown. That is their own prerogative.

And so, when Mr. Shovelin returned, with a bundle of papers which had also vexed him —to judge by the way in which he threw them down—I spoke very mildly, and said that I was very sorry for my display of violence, but that if he knew all he would pardon me; and he pardoned me in a moment.

'I was going to tell you, my dear Miss Castlewood,' he continued, gently, 'that your sudden idea must be dismissed, for reasons

which I think will content you. In the first place, the present Lord Castlewood is, and always has been, an exemplary man, of great piety, and true gentleness; in the next place, he is an invalid, who cannot walk a mile with a crutch to help him, and so he has been for a great many years. And, lastly, if you have no faith in the rest, he was in Italy at the time, and remained there for some years afterwards. There he received and sheltered your poor father, after his sad calamity, and was better than a brother to him, as your father, in a letter to me, declared. So, you see, that you must acquit him.'

'That is not enough. I would beg his pardon on my knees, since he helped my father, for he must have thought him innocent. Now, Mr. Shovelin, you were my father's friend, and you are such a clever man——'

'How do you know that, young lady? What a hurry you are always in!'

'Oh, there can be no doubt about it! But you must not ask reasons, if I am so quick. Now, please to tell me what your own con-

clusion is. I can talk of it calmly now; yes, quite calmly, because I never think of anything else. Only tell me what you really believe, and I will keep it most strictly to myself.'

'I am sure you will do that,' he answered, smiling; 'not only from the power of your will, my dear, but also because I have nothing to say. At first I was strongly inclined to believe (knowing, from my certainty of your father, that the universal opinion must be wrong) that the old lord had done it himself; for he always had been of a headstrong and violent nature, which I am sure will never reappear in you. But the whole of the evidence went against this; and little as I think of evidence, especially at an inquest, your father's behaviour confirmed what was sworn to. Your father knew that his father had not made away with himself in a moment of passion, otherwise he was not the man to break prison, and fly trial. He would have said boldly, "I am guiltless; there are many things that I cannot explain; I cannot help that; I will face it out. Condemn me, if you like, and I will suffer."

From your own remembrance of your father's nature, is not that certainly the course he would have taken?'

'I have not an atom of doubt about it. His flight and persistent dread of trial puzzle me beyond imagination. Of his life he was perfectly reckless; except, at least, for my sake.'

'I know that he was,' Mr. Shovelin replied; 'as a boy he was wonderfully fearless. As a man, with a sweet wife and a lot of children, he might have begun to be otherwise. But when all those were gone, and only a poor little baby left——'

'Yes, I suppose I was all that?'

'Forgive me. I am looking back at you. Who could dream that you would ever even live without kith or kin to care for you? Your life was saved by some good woman who took you away to Wales. But when you were such a poor little relic, and your father could scarcely have seen you, to have such a mite left must have been almost a mockery of happiness. That motive could not have been strong enough to prevent a man of proud honour from doing

what honour at once demanded. Your father would have returned and surrendered as soon as he heard of his dear wife's death, if in the balance there had been only you.'

'Yes, Mr. Shovelin, perhaps he would. I was never very much, as a counter-balance. Yet my father loved me.' I could have told him of the pledge exchanged—'for my sake,' and, 'yes, for your sake,' with love and wedded honour set to fight cold, desolate repute—but I did not say a word about it.

'He loved you afterwards, of course. But a man who has had seven children is not enthusiastic about a baby. There must have been a larger motive.'

'But, when I was the only one left alive. Surely I became valuable then. I cannot have been such a cipher.'

'Yes, for a long time you would have been,' replied the Saturnian banker. 'I do not wish to disparage your attractions, when you were a fortnight old. They may have begun already to be irresistible. Excuse me; you have led me into the light vein, when speaking of a most

sad matter. You must blame your self-assertion for it. All I wish to convey to you is my belief that something, wholly unknown to us, some dark mystery of which we have no inkling, lies at the bottom of this terrible affair. Some strange motive there must have been, strong enough even to overcome all ordinary sense of honour, and an Englishman's pride in submitting to the law, whatever may be the consequence. Consider that his "flight from justice," as it was called, of course by everyone, condemned his case and ruined his repute. Even for that he would not have cared so much as for his own sense of right. And though he was a very lively fellow, as I first remember him, full of tricks and jokes, and so on, which in this busy age are out of date, I am certain that he always had a stern sense of right. One never knows how love-affairs, and weakness about children, may alter almost any man; but my firm conviction is that my dear old school-fellow, George Castlewood, even with a wife and lovely children hanging altogether upon his life, not only would not have broken jail, but would

calmly have given up his body to be hanged—pardon me, my dear, for putting it so coarsely—if there had not been something paramount to over-ride even apparent honour. What it can have been, I have no idea; and I presume you have none.'

'None whatever,' I said at once, in answer to his inquiring gaze; 'I am quite taken by surprise; I never even thought of such a thing. It has always seemed to me so natural that my dear father, being shamefully condemned, because appearances were against him, and nobody could enter into him, should, for the sake of his wife and children, or even of one child like me, depart or banish himself, or emigrate, or as they might call it, run away. Knowing that he never could have a fair trial, it was the only straightforward, and good, and affectionate thing for him to do.'

'You cannot see things as men see them. We must not expect it of you,' Mr. Shovelin answered, with a kind but rather too superior smile, which reminded me a little of dear Uncle Sam, when he listened to what, in his opinion,

was only female reason ; 'but, dear me, here is Major Hockin come! Punctuality is the soul of business.'

'So I always declare,' cried the Major, who was more than three-quarters of an hour late, for which, in my heart, I thanked him. 'My watch keeps time to a minute, Sir, and its master to a second. Well, I hope you have settled all questions of finance, and endowed my young maid with a fortune.'

'So far from that,' Mr. Shovelin replied, in a tone very different from that he used to me, 'we have not even said one word of business; all that has been left for your return. Am I to understand that you are by appointment, or relationship, the guardian of this young lady?'

'God forbid!' cried Major Hockin, shortly. I thought it very rude of him, yet I could not help smiling to see how he threw his glasses up and lifted his wiry crest of hair. 'Not that she is bad, I mean, but good, very good; indeed, I may say the very best girl ever known outside of my own family. My cousin, Colonel Gundry, who owns an immense estate in the most auri-

ferous district of all California, but will not spoil his splendid property by mining—he will, he will tell you the very same thing, Sir.'

'I am very glad to hear it,' said the banker, smiling at me, while I wondered what it was, but hoped that it meant my praises. 'Now I really fear that I must be very brief, though the daughter of my oldest friend may well be preferred to business. But now we will turn at once to business, if you please.'

CHAPTER XXVII.

COUSIN MONTAGUE.

Mr. Shovelin went to a corner of the room, which might be called his signal-box, having a little row of port-holes, like a toy frigate or accordion, and there he made sounds which brought steps very promptly, one clerk carrying a mighty ledger, and the other a small strong box.

'No plate,' Major Hockin whispered to me, shaking his grey crest with sorrow; 'but there may be diamonds, you know, Erema. One ounce of diamonds is worth a ton of plate.'

'No,' said Mr. Shovelin, whose ears were very keen, 'I fear that you will find nothing of mercantile value. Thank you, Mr. Robinson; by and by perhaps we shall trouble you. Strictly speaking, perhaps I should require the presence of your father's lawyer, or of some

one producing probate, ere I open this box, Miss Castlewood. But having you here, and Major Hockin, and knowing what I do about the matter (which is one of personal confidence), I will dispense with formalities. We have given your father's solicitor notice of this deposit, and requested his attention, but he never has deigned to attend to it; so now we will dispense with him. You see that the seal is unbroken; you know your father's favourite seal, no doubt. The key is nothing; it was left to my charge. You wish that I should open this?'

Certainly I did, and the banker split the seal with an ebony-handled paper-knife, and very soon unlocked the steel-ribbed box, whose weight was chiefly of itself. Some cotton-wool lay on the top to keep the all-penetrative dust away, and then a sheet of blue foolscap paper, partly covered with clear but crooked writing, and under that some little twists of silver paper, screwed as if there had been no time to tie them, and a packet of letters held together by a glittering bracelet.

'Poor fellow!' Mr. Shovelin said, loftily,

while I held my breath, and the Major had the courtesy to be silent. 'This is his will; of no value, I fear, in a pecuniary point of view, but of interest to you, his daughter. Shall I open it, Miss Castlewood, or send it to his lawyers?'

'Open it, and never think of them,' said I; 'like the rest, they have forsaken him. Please to read it to yourself, and then tell us.'

'Oh, I wish I had known this before,' cried the banker, after a rapid glance or two; very kind, very flattering, I am sure! Yes, I will do my duty by him; I wish there was more to be done in the case. He has left me sole executor, and trustee of all his property, for the benefit of his surviving child. Yet he never gave me the smallest idea of expecting me to do this for him. Otherwise, of course, I should have had this old box opened years ago.'

'We must look at things as they are,' said Major Hockin, for I could say nothing; 'the question is, what do you mean to do now?'

'Nothing whatever,' said the banker, crisply, being displeased at the other's tone; and then, seeing my surprise, he addressed himself to me:

'Nothing, at present, but congratulate myself upon my old friend's confidence, and, as Abernethy said, "take advice." A banker must never encroach upon the province of the lawyer. But so far as a layman may judge, Major Hockin, I think you will have to transfer to me the care of this young lady.'

'I shall be only too happy, I assure you,' the Major answered truthfully. 'My wife has a great regard for her, and so have I—the very greatest, the strongest regard, and warm parental feelings; as you know, Erema. But—but, I am not so young as I was; and I have to develop my property.'

'Of which she no longer forms a part,' Mr. Shovelin answered, with a smile at me, which turned into pleasure my momentary pain at the other's calm abandonment. 'You will find me prompt and proud to claim her, as soon as I am advised that this will is valid; and that I shall learn to-morrow.'

In spite of pride, or by its aid, my foolish eyes were full of tears, and I gave him a look of gratitude which reminded him of my father, as he said in so many words.

'Oh, I hope it is valid! How I hope it is!' I exclaimed, turning round to the Major, who smiled rather grimly, and said he hoped so too.

'But surely,' he continued, 'as we are all here, we should not neglect the opportunity of inspecting the other contents of this box. To me it appears that we are bound to do so; that it is our plain duty to ascertain—why, there might even be a later will. Erema, my dear, you must be most anxious to get to the bottom of it.'

So I was, but desired even more that his curiosity should be foiled. 'We must leave that to Mr. Shovelin,' I said.

'Then for the present we will seal it down again,' the banker answered quietly; 'we can see that there is no other will, and a later one would scarcely be put under this. The other little packets, whatever they may be, are objects of curiosity, perhaps, rather than of importance. They will keep till we have more leisure.'

'We have taken up a great deal of your time, Sir, I am sure,' said the Major, finding that he could take no more. 'We ought to be, and we are, most grateful.'

'Well,' the banker answered, as we began to move; 'such things do not happen every day. But there is no friend like an old friend, Erema, as I mean to call you now; I was to have been your godfather, but I fear that you never have been baptised.'

'What!' cried the Major, staring at us both. 'Is such a thing possible in a Christian land? Oh, how I have neglected my duty to the Church! Come back with me to Bruntsea, and my son shall do it. The church there is under my orders, I should hope; and we will have a dinner-party afterwards. What a horrible neglect of duty!'

'But how could I help it?' I exclaimed, with some terror at Major Hockin's bristling hair. 'I cannot remember—I am sure I cannot say. It may have been done in France, or somewhere, if there was no time in England. At any rate, my father is not to be blamed.'

'Papistical baptism is worse than none,' the Major said impressively; 'never mind, my dear, we will make that all right. You shall not be a savage always. We will take the

opportunity to change your name. Erema is popish and outlandish; one scarcely knows how to pronounce it. You shall have a good English Christian name, Jemima, Jane, or Sophy. Trust me to know a good name. Trust me.'

'Jemima!' I cried. 'Oh, Mr. Shovelin, save me from ever being called Jemima! Rather would I never be baptised at all.'

'I am no judge of names,' he answered, smiling, as he shook hands with us; 'but, unless I am a very bad judge of faces, you will be called just what you please.'

'And I please to be called what my father called me. It may be unlucky, as a gentleman told me, who did not know how to pronounce it. However, it will do very well for me. You wish to see me then to-morrow, Mr. Shovelin?'

'If you please; but later in the day, when I am more at leisure. I do not run away very early. Come at half-past four to this door, and knock. I hear every sound at this door in my room; and the place will be growing quiet then.'

He showed us out into a narrow alley through

a heavy door sheathed with iron, and soon we recovered the fair light of day, and the brawl and roar of a London street.

'Now where shall we go?' the Major asked, as soon as he had found a cab again, for he was very polite in that way. 'You kept early hours with your "Uncle Sam," as you call Colonel Gundry, a slow-witted man, but most amusing when he likes, as slow-witted men very often are. Now will you come and dine with me? I can generally dine, as you with virtuous indignation found out, at Southampton. But we are better friends now, Miss Heathen.'

'Yes, I have more than I can ever thank you for,' I answered very gravely, for I never could become jocose to order, and sadness still was uppermost. 'I will go where you like; I am quite at your orders, because Betsy Bowen is busy now. She will not have done her work till six o'clock.'

'Well done!' he cried; 'bravo Young America! Frankness is the finest of all good manners. And what a lot of clumsy deception it saves! Then let us go and dine. I will imitate

your truthfulness. It was two words for myself, and one for you. The air of London always makes me hungry after too much country air. It is wrong altogether, but I cannot help it. And going along I smell hungry smells coming out of deep holes with a plate at the top. Hungry I mean to a man who has known what absolute starvation is—when a man would thank God for a blue-bottle fly who had taken his own nip anywhere. When I see the young fellows at the clubs pick this, and poke that, and push away the other, may I be d——d; my dear, I beg your pardon. Cabby, to the "Grilled Bone and Scolloped Cockle," at the bottom of St. Ventricle Lane, you know.'

This place seemed from what the Major said, to have earned repute for something special, something esteemed by the very clever people, and only to be found in true virtue here. And he told me that luxury and self-indulgence were the greatest sins of the present age; and how he admired a man who came here to protest against Epicureans, by dining (liquors not included) for the sum of three-and-sixpence.

All this, no doubt, was wise and right; but I could not attend to it properly now; and he might take me where he would, and have all the talking to himself, according to his practice. And I might not even have been able to say what this temple of bones and cockles was like, except for a little thing which happened there. The room, at the head of a twisting staircase, was low and dark, and furnished almost like a farm-house kitchen. It had no carpet, nor even a mat, but a floor of black timber, and a ceiling coloured blue, with stars, and comets, and a full moon near the fireplace. On either side of the room stood narrow tables endwise to the walls, enclosed with high-backed seats like settles, forming thus a double set of little stalls or boxes, with scarcely space enough between for waiters, more urgent than New York firemen, to push their steaming and breathless way.

'Square or round, Miss?' said one of them to me as soon as the Major had set me on a bench, and before my mind had time to rally towards criticism of the knives and forks, which deprecated any such ordeal; and he cleverly

whipped a stand for something dirty, over something still dirtier, on the cloth.

'I don't understand what you mean,' I replied to his highly zealous aspect, while the Major sat smiling drily at my ignorance, which vexed me. 'I have never received such a question before. Major Hockin, will you kindly answer him?'

'Square,' said the Major; 'square for both.' And the waiter, with a glance of pity at me, hurried off to carry out his order.

'Erema, your mind is all up in the sky,' my companion began to remonstrate; 'you ought to know better after all your travels.'

'Then the sky should not fall and confuse me so,' I said, pointing to the Milky Way, not more than a yard above me; 'but do tell me what he meant if you can. Is it about the formation of the soup?'

'Hush, my dear! Soup is high treason here until night, when they make it of the leavings. His honest desire was to know whether you would have a grilled bone of mutton, which is naturally round, you know, or of beef, which

by the same law of nature seems always to be square, you know.'

'Oh, I see,' I replied, with some confusion, not at his osteology, but at the gaze of a pair of living and lively eyes fastened upon me. A gentleman, waiting for his bill, had risen in the next low box, and stood calmly (as if he had done all his duty to himself) gazing over the wooden back at me, who thus sat facing him. And Major Hockin, following my glance, stood up and turned round to see to it.

'What! cousin Montague! Bless my heart, who could have dreamed of lighting on you here? Come in, my dear fellow, there is plenty of room. Let me introduce you to my new ward, Miss Erema Castlewood. Miss Castlewood, this is Sir Montague Hockin, the son of my lamented first-cousin Sir Rufus, of whom you have heard so much. Well, to be sure! I have not seen you for an age. My dear fellow, now how are you?'

'Miss Castlewood, please not to move; I sit anywhere. Major, I am most delighted to see you! Over and over again I have been at the

point of starting for Bruntsea Island—it is an island now, isn't it? My father would never believe that it was, till I proved it from the number of rabbits that came up. However, not a desolate island now if it contains you and all your energies, and Miss Castlewood, as well as Mrs. Hockin.'

'It is not an island, and it never shall be,' the Major cried, knocking a blue plate over, and spilling the salt inauspiciously; 'it never was an island, and it never shall be; my intention is to reclaim it altogether. Oh, here come the squares! Well done, well done! I quite forget the proper thing to have to drink. Are the cockles in the pan, Mr. Waiter? Quite right, then; ten minutes is the proper time; but they know that better than I do. I am very sorry, Montague, that you have dined.'

'Surely you would not call this a dinner; I take my true luncheon afterwards. But lately my appetite has been so bad that it must be fed up at short intervals. You can understand that perhaps, Miss Castlewood. It makes the confectioners' fortunes, you know. The

ladies once came only twice to feed, but now they come three times, I am assured by a young man who knows all about it. And cherry-brandy is the mildest form of tipple.'

'Shocking scandal! abominable talk!' cried the Major, who took everything at its word; 'I have heard all that sort of stuff ever since I was as high as this table. Waiter, show me this gentleman's bill. Oh well, oh well! you have not done so very badly. Two squares and a round, with a jug of Steinberg, and a pint of British stout with your Stilton. If this is your ante-lunch, what will you do when you come to your real luncheon? But I must not talk now; you may have it as you please.'

'The truth of it is, Miss Castlewood,' said the young man, while I looked with some curiosity at my frizzling bone, with the cover just whisked off, and drops of its juice (like the rays of a lustre) shaking with soft inner wealth; 'the truth of it is just this, and no more—we fix our minds and our thoughts, and all the rest of our higher intelligence, a great deal too much upon our mere food.'

'No doubt we do,' I was obliged to answer; 'it is very sad to think of, as soon as one has dined. But does that reflection occur, as it should, at the proper time to be useful,—I mean when we are hungry?'

'I fear not; I fear that it is rather præterite than practical.'

'No big words now, my dear fellow!' cried the Major; 'you have had your turn, let us have ours. But, Erema, you are eating nothing; take a knife and fork, Montague, and help her. The beauty of these things consists entirely, absolutely, essentially, I may say, in their having the smoke rushing out of them. A gush of steam like this should follow every turn of the knife—but there, I am spoiling every bit by talking so!'

'Is that any fault of mine?' asked Sir Montague, in a tone which made me look at him. The voice was not harsh, nor rough, nor unpleasant, yet it gave me the idea that it could be all three, and worse than all three upon occasion. So I looked at him, which I had refrained from doing, to see whether his

face confirmed that idea. To the best of my perception, it did not. Sir Montague Hockin was rather good-looking, so far as form and colour go, having regular features, and clear blue eyes, very beautiful teeth, and a golden beard. His appearance was grave, but not morose, as if he were always examining things and people, without condemning them. It was evident that he expected to take the upper hand in general, to play the first fiddle, to hold the top saw, to 'be helped to all the stuffing of the pumpkin,' as dear Uncle Sam was fond of saying. Of moderate stature, almost of middle age, and dressed nicely, without any gewgaws, which look so common upon a gentleman's front, he was likely to please more people than he displeased at first onsight.

The Major was now in the flush of good-will, having found his dinner genial, and being a good man, he yielded to a little sympathetic anger with those who had done less justice to themselves. And, in this state of mind, he begged us to take note of one thing—that his ward should be christened in Bruntsea Church,

as sure as all the bells were his, according to their inscriptions, no later than next Thursday week, that being the day for a good sirloin; and if Sir Montague failed to come to see how they could manage things under proper administration, he might be sure of one thing, if no more—that Major Hockin would never speak to him again.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A CHECK.

So many things now began to open upon me, to do and to think of, that I scarcely knew which to begin with. I used to be told how much wiser it was not to interfere with anything: to let bygones be bygones, and consider my own self only. But this advice never came home to my case, and it always seemed an unworthy thing even to be listening to it. And now I saw reason to be glad for thanking people who advised me, and letting them go on to advise themselves. For if I had listened to Major Hockin, or even Uncle Sam for that part, where must I have been now? Why, simply knowing no more than as a child I knew, and feeling miserable about it. Whereas I had now at least something to go upon, and enough for a long time to occupy my mind.

The difficulty was to know what to do first, and what to resolve to leave undone, or, at least, to put off for the present. One of my special desires had been to discover that man, that Mr. Goad, who had frightened me so about two years back, and was said to be lost in the snowdrifts. But nobody like him had ever been found, to the sorrow of the neighbourhood; and Sylvester himself had been disappointed, not even to know what to do with his clothes.

His card, however, before he went off, had been left to the care of Uncle Sam for security of the 15,000 dollars; and on it was printed, with a glazing and much flourish, 'Vypan, Goad, and Terryer: Private Enquiry Office, Little England Polygon, W.C.' Uncle Sam, with a grunt and a rise of his foot, had sent this low card flying to the fire, after I had kissed him so for all his truth and loveliness, but I had caught it and made him give it to me, as was only natural. And having this now I had been quite prepared to go and present it at its mean address, and ask what

they wanted me for in America, and what they would like to do with me now, taking care to have either the Major close at hand, or else a policeman well recommended.

But now I determined to wait a little while (if Betsy Bowen's opinion should be at all the same as mine was), and to ask Mr. Shovelin what he thought about it, before doing anything that might arouse a set of ideas quite opposite to mine, and so cause trouble afterwards. And being unable to think any better for the time than to wait and be talked to, I got Major Hockin to take me back again to the right number in European Square.

Here I found Mrs. Strouss (born, Betsy Bowen) ready and eager to hear a great deal more than I myself had heard that day. On the other hand I had many questions, arising from things said to me, to which I required clear answers; and it never would do for her to suppose that because she had known me come into this world, she must govern the whole of my course therein. But it cost many words and a great deal of demeanour, to teach her that,

good and faithful as she was, I could not be always under her. Yet I promised to take her advice whenever it agreed with my own opinions.

This pleased her, and she promised to offer it always, knowing how well it would be received, and she told all her lodgers that they might ring and ring; for she did not mean to answer any of their bells; but, if they wanted anything, they must go and fetch it. Being Germans, who are the most docile of men in England, whatever they may be at home, they made no complaint, but retired to their pipes, in a pleasant condition of surprise at London habits.

Mrs. Strouss, being from her earliest years of a thrifty and reputable turn of mind, had managed, in a large yet honest way, to put by many things which must prove useful in the long run, if kept long enough. And I did hear—most careful as I am to pay no attention to petty rumours—that the first thing that moved the heart of Herr Strouss, and called forth his finest feelings, was a winding-up chair,

which came out to make legs, with a pocket for tobacco, and a flat place for a glass.

This was certainly a paltry thought; and to think of such low things grieved me. And now, when I looked at Mr. Strouss himself, having heard of none of these things yet, I felt that my nurse might not have done her best, yet might have done worse, when she married him. For he seemed to have taken a liking towards me, and an interest in my affairs, which redounded to his credit, if he would not be too inquisitive. And now, I gladly allowed him to be present, and to rest in the chair which had captivated him; although last night I could scarcely have borne to have heard in his presence what I had to hear. To-night there was nothing distressful to be said, compared at least with last night's tale; whereas there were several questions to be put, in some of which (while scouting altogether Uncle's Sam's low estimate) two females might, with advantage perhaps, obtain an opinion from the stronger sex.

And now, as soon as I had told my two

friends as well as I could, what had happened at the Bank (with which they were pleased, as I had been), those questions arose, and were, I believe, chiefly to the following purport,—setting aside the main puzzle of all.

Why did my father say, on that dreadful morning, that if his father was dead, he himself had killed, or murdered him? Betsy believed, when she came to think, that he had even used the worse word of these two.

How could the fatal shot have been discharged from his pistol—as clearly it had been—a pistol moreover which by his own account, as Betsy now remembered, he had left in his quarters near Chichester?

What was that horrible disease which had carried off all my poor little brothers and sisters, and frightened kind neighbours and servants away? Betsy said it was called 'Differeria,' as differing so much from all other complaints. I had never yet heard of this, but discovered, without asking further than of Mr. Strouss, that she meant that urgent mandate for a levy of small angels, which is called on earth 'diphtheria.'

Who had directed those private enquirers, Vypan, Goad, and Terryer, to send to the far West a member of their firm, to get legal proof of my dear father's death, and to bring me back, if possible? The present Lord Castlewood never would have done so, according to what Mr. Shovelin said; it was far more likely that (but for weak health) he would have come forth himself to seek me, upon any probable tidings. At once a religious and chivalrous man, he would never employ mean agency. And while thinking of that, another thought occurred—What had induced that low man Goad to give Uncle Sam a date wrong altogether for the crime which began all our misery? He had put it at ten —now twelve years back, and dated it in November, whereas it had happened in September month, six years and two months before the date he gave. This question was out of all answer to me, and also to Mrs. Strouss herself; but Herr Strouss, being of a legal turn, believed that the law was to blame for it. He thought that proceedings might be bound to begin, under the Extradition Act, within ten years of the date of the crime; or there might be

some other stipulation compelling Mr. Goad to add one to all his falsehoods; and not knowing anything about it, both of us thought it very likely.

Again, what could have been that last pledge which passed between my father and mother, when they said 'good-bye' to one another, and perhaps knew that it was for ever, so far as this bodily world is concerned? Was it anything about a poor little sleeping whimpering creature like myself, who could not yet make any difference to any living being except the mother? Or was it concerning far more important things, justice, clear honour, goodwill, and duty, such as in the crush of time come upwards with high natures? And if so, was it not a promise from my mother, knowing everything to say nothing, even at the quivering moment of lying beneath the point of death?

This was a new idea for Betsy, who had concluded, from the very first, that the pledge must be on my father's part—to wit, that he had vowed not to surrender, or hurt himself in any way, for the sake of his dear wife. And to my

suggestion, she could only say that she never had seen it in that light; but the landings were so narrow, and the walls so soft, that with all her duty staring in her face, neither she, nor the best servant ever in an apron, could be held responsible to repeat their very words. And her husband said that this was good—very good—so good as ever could be; and what was to show now from the mouth of any one, after fifteen, sixteen, eighteen, the years?

After this, I had no other word to say, being still too young to contradict people duly married and of one accord. No other word I mean, upon that point; though still I had to ask, upon matters more immediate, what was the next thing for me, perhaps, to do. And first of all it was settled among us, that for me to present myself at the head-quarters of Vypan, Goad, and Terryer, would be a very clumsy and stupid proceeding, and perhaps even dangerous. Of course they would not reveal to me the author of those kind inquiries about myself, which perhaps had cost the firm a very valuable life, the life of Mr. Goad himself. And while I

should learn less than nothing from them, they would most easily extract from me, or at any rate find out afterwards, where I was living, and what I was doing, and how I could most quietly be met and baffled, and perhaps even made away with, so as to save all further trouble.

Neither was that the only point upon which I resolved to do nothing. Herr Strouss was a very simple-minded man, yet full of true sagacity, and he warmly advised, in his very worst English, that none but my few trusty friends should be told of my visit to this country.

'Why for make to know your enemies?' he asked, with one finger on his forehead, which was his mode of indicating caution. 'Enemies find out vere soon, too soon, soon enough. Begin to plot—no, no, young lady begin first. Vilhelmina, your man say the right. Is it good, or is it bad?'

It appeared to us both to be good, so far as might be judged for the present; and therefore I made up my mind to abstain from calling even on my father's agent, unless Mr. Shovelin should

think it needful. In that and other matters, I would act by his advice; and so with better spirits than I long had owned, at finding so much kindness, and with good hopes of the morrow, I went to the snug little bedroom which my good nurse had provided.

Alas! What was my little grief on the morrow, compared to the deep and abiding loss of many by a good man's death. When I went to the door at which I had been told to knock, it was long before I got an answer. And even when somebody came at last, so far from being my guardian, it was only a poor old clerk, who said 'Hush, Miss!' and then prayed that the will of the Lord might be done. 'Couldn't you see the half-shutters up?' he continued rather roughly. 'Tis a bad job for many a poor man to-day. And it seems no more than yesterday I was carrying him about!'

'Do you mean Mr. Shovelin?' I asked. 'Is he poorly? Has anything happened? I can wait, or come again.'

'The Lord has taken him to the mansions of the just, from his private address at

Sydenham Hill. A burning and a shining light! May we like him be found watching in that day, with our lamps trimmed, and our loins girded!'

For the moment I was too surprised to speak, and the kind old man led me into the passage, seeing how pale and faint I was. He belonged, like his master, and a great part of their business, to a simple religious persuasion, or faith, which now is very seldom heard of.

'It was just in this way,' he said, as soon as tears had enabled me to speak—for even at the first sight I had felt affection towards my new guardian—'our master is a very punctual man, for five and thirty years never late—never late once till this morning. Excuse me, Miss, I ought to be ashamed. The Lord knoweth what is best for us. Well, you threw him out a good bit yesterday, and there was other troubles. And he had to work late last night, I hear; for through his work he would go, be it anyhow—diligent in business, husbanding the time—and when he came down to breakfast this morning, he prayed with his household as usual, but they

noticed his voice rather weak and queer; and the mistress looked at him when he got up from his knees; but he drank his cup of tea, and he ate his bit of toast, which was all he ever took for breakfast. But presently when his cob came up to the door—for he always rode in to business, Miss, no matter what the weather was—he went to kiss his wife and his daughters all round, according to their ages; and he got through them all, when away he fell down, with the riding-whip in one hand, and expired on a piece of Indian matting.'

'How terrible!' I exclaimed with a sob. And the poor old man, in spite of all his piety, was sobbing.

'No Miss; not a bit of terror about it, to a man prepared as he was. He had had some warning just a year ago; and the doctors all told him he must leave off work. He could no more do without his proper work than he could without air or victuals. What this old established concern will do without him, our Divine Master only knows. And a pinch coming on in Threadneedle Street, I hear—but I scarcely

know what I am saying, Miss—I was thinking of the camel and the needle.'

'I will not repeat what you have not meant to tell,' I answered, seeing his confusion, and the clumsy turn he had made of it. 'Only tell me what dear Mr. Shovelin died of.'

'Heart-disease, Miss. You might know in a moment. Nothing kills like that. His poor father died of it, thirty years a-gone. And the better people are, the more they get it.'

CHAPTER XXIX.

AT THE PUMP.

This blow was so sharp and heavy that I lost for the moment all power to go on. The sense of ill-fortune fell upon me, as it falls upon stronger people, when a sudden gleam of hope, breaking through long troubles, mysteriously fades away.

Even the pleasure of indulging in the gloom of evil luck was a thing to be ashamed of now, when I thought of that good man's family thus, without a moment's warning, robbed of love, and hope, and happiness. But Mrs. Strouss, who often brooded on predestination, embittered all my thoughts by saying, or rather conveying without words, that my poor father's taint of some divine ill-will had reappeared, and even killed his banker.

Betsy held most Low-church views, by

nature, being a Dissenter. She called herself a Baptist, and in some strange way had stopped me thus from ever having been baptised. I do not understand these things, and the battles fought about them; but knowing that my father was a member of the English Church, I resolved to be the same, and told Betsy that she ought not to set up against her master's doctrine. Then she herself became ashamed of trying to convert me, not only because of my ignorance (which made argument like shooting into the sea), but chiefly because she could mention no one of title with such theology.

This settled the question at once; and remembering (to my shame) what opinions I had held even of Suan Isco, while being in the very same predicament myself, reflecting also what Uncle Sam and Firm would have thought of me—had they known it, I anticipated the Major and his dinner-party by going to a quiet ancient clergyman, who examined me, and being satisfied with little, took me to an old city church of deep and damp retirement. And here, with a great din of traffic outside, and a mildewy

depth of repose within, I was presented by certain sponsors (the clerk and his wife, and his wife's sister), and heard good words, and hope to keep the impression, both outward and inward, gently made upon me.

I need not say that I kept, and now received with authority, my old name; though the clerk prefixed an aspirate to it, and indulged in two syllables only. But the ancient parson knew its meaning, and looked at me with curiosity; yet, being a gentleman of the old school, put never a question about it.

Now this being done, and full tidings thereof sent off to Mrs. Hockin, to save trouble to the butcher, or other disappointment, I scarcely knew how to be moving next; though move I must before very long. For it cost me a great deal of money to stay in European Square like this, albeit Herr Strouss was of all men the most generous, by his own avowal, and his wife (by the same test) noble-hearted among women. Yet each of them spoke of the other's pecuniary views in such a desponding tone (when the other was out of the way), and so lamented

to have anything at all to say about cash—by compulsion of the other—also both, when met together, were so large and reckless, and not to be insulted by a thought of payment; that it came to pass that my money did nothing but run away between them.

This was not their fault at all; but all my own, for being unable to keep my secret about the great nugget. The Major had told me not to speak of this, according to wise experience; and I had not the smallest intention of doing an atom of mischief in that way; but somehow or other it came out one night when I was being pitied for my desolation. And all the charges against me began to be doubled from that moment.

If this had been all I should not have cared so much, being quite content that my money should go as fast as it came in to me. But there was another thing here which cost me as much as my board and lodgings, and all the rest of my expenses. And that was the iron pump in European Square. For this pump stood in the very centre of a huddled district

of famine, filth, and fever. When once I had seen from the leads of our house the quag of reeking life around, the stubs and snags of chimney-pots, the gashes among them entitled streets, and the broken blains called houses, I was quite ashamed of paying anything to become a Christian.

Betsy, who stood by me, said that it was better than it used to be, and that all these people lived in comfort of their own ideas, fiercely resented all interference, and were good to one another in their own rough way. It was more than three years since there had been a single murder among them, and even then the man who was killed confessed that he deserved it. She told me also, that in some mining district of Wales well known to her, things were a great deal worse than here, although the people were not half so poor. And finally, looking at a ruby ring which I had begged her to wear always, for the sake of her truth to me, she begged me to be wiser than to fret about things that I could not change. 'All these people, whose hovels I saw, had the means of

grace before them, and if they would not stretch forth their hands it was only because they were vessels of wrath. Her pity was rather for our poor black brethren who had never enjoyed no opportunities, and therefore must be castaways.'

Being a stranger, and so young, and accustomed to receive my doctrine (since first I went to America), I dropped all intention of attempting any good in places where I might be murdered. But I could not help looking at the pump which was in front, and the poor things who came there for water, and most of all the children. With these it was almost the joy of the day, and perhaps the only joy, to come into this little open space and stand, and put their backs up stiffly, and stare about, ready for some good luck to turn up—such as a horse to hold, or a man coming out of the docks with a half-penny to spare—and then, in failure of such golden hope, to dash about, in and out, after one another, splashing, and kicking over their own cans, kettles, jars, or buckets, and stretching their dirty little naked legs, and showing very often fine white chests, and bright teeth

wet with laughter. And then, when this chivy was done, and their quick little hearts beat aloud with glory, it was pretty to see them all rally round the pump, as crafty as their betters, and watching with sly humour each other's readiness to begin again.

Then suddenly a sense of neglected duty would seize some little body with a hand to its side, nine times out of ten a girl, whose mother, perhaps, lay sick at home, and a stern idea of responsibility began to make the buckets clank. Then might you see, if you cared to do so, orderly management have its turn, a demand for pins and a tucking up of skirts (which scarcely seemed worthy of the great young fuss), large children scolding little ones not a bit more muddy than themselves, the while the very least child of all, too young as yet for chivying, and only come for company, would smoothe her comparatively clean frock down, and look up at her sisters with condemnatory eyes.

Trivial as they were, these things amused me much, and made a little chequer of reflected

light upon the cloud of selfish gloom, especially when the real work began, and the children, vying with one another, set to at the iron handle. This was too large for their little hands to grasp, and by means of some grievance inside, or perhaps through a cruel trick of the plumber, up went the long handle every time small fingers were too confiding, and there it stood up like the tail of a rampant cow, or a branch inaccessible, until an old shawl or the cord of a peg-top could be cast up on high to reduce it. But some engineering boy, 'highly gifted,' like Uncle Sam's self, 'with machinery,' had discovered an ingenious cure for this. With the help of the girls he used to fasten a fat little thing, about twelve months old, in the bend at the middle of the handle, and there (like a ham on the steel-yard) hung this baby and enjoyed see-saw, and laughed at its own utility.

I never saw this, and the splashing and dribbling and play, and bright revelry of water, without forgetting all sad counsel and discretion, and rushing out as if the dingy pump were

my own delicious Blue River. People used to look at me from the windows with pity and astonishment, supposing me to be crazed or frantic, especially the Germans. For to run out like this, without a pocket full of money, would have been insanity; and to run out with it, to their minds, was even clearer proof of that condition. For the money went as quickly as the water of the pump, on this side and on that it flew, each child in succession making deeper drain upon it, in virtue of still deeper woes. They were dreadful little story-tellers, I am very much afraid, and the long faces pulled, as soon as I came out, in contrast with all the recent glee and frolic, suggested to even the youngest charity suspicions of some inconsistency. However, they were so ingenious and clever that they worked my pockets like the pump itself, only with this unhappy difference, that the former had no inexhaustible supply.

And thus, by a reason (as cogent as any of more exalted nature), was I driven back to my head-quarters, there to abide till a fresh supply

should come. For Uncle Sam, generous and noble as he was, did not mean to let me melt all away at once my share of the great Blue River nugget, any more than to make ducks and drakes of his own. Indeed, that rock of gold was still untouched, and healthily reposing in a banker's cellar in the good town of Sacramento. People were allowed to go in and see it upon payment of a dollar, and they came out so thirsty from feasting upon it, that a bar was set up, and a pile of money made; all the gentlemen, and ladies even worse than they, taking a reckless turn about small money, after seeing that. But dear Uncle Sam refused every cent of the profit of all this excitable work. It was wholly against his wish that anything so artificial should be done at all, and his sense of religion condemned it. He said, in his very first letter to me, that even a heathen must acknowledge this champion nugget as the grandest work of the Lord yet discovered in America, a country more full of all works of the Lord than the rest of the world put together. And to keep it in a cellar, without any

air or sun, grated harshly upon his ideas of right.

However, he did not expect everybody to think exactly as he did, and if they could turn a few dollars upon it they were welcome, as having large families. And the balance might go to his credit against the interest on any cash advanced to him. Not that he meant to be very fast with this, never having run into debt in all his life.

This, put shortly, was the reason why I could not run to the pump any longer. I had come into England with money enough to last me (according to the Sawyer's calculations) for a year and a half of every needful work; whereas, in less than half that time, I was arriving at my last penny. This reminded me of my dear father, who was nearly always in trouble about money (although so strictly upright); and at first I was proud to be like him about this, till I came to find the disadvantages.

It must not even for a moment be imagined that this made any difference in the behaviour of any one towards me. Mrs. Strouss, Herr

Strouss, the lady on the stairs, and a very clever woman who had got no rooms, but was kindly accommodated everywhere, as well as the baron on the first floor front, and the gentleman from an hotel at Hanover, who looked out the other way, and even the children at the pump—not one made any difference towards me (as an enemy might, perhaps, suppose) because my last half-crown was gone. It was admitted upon every side that I ought to be forgiven for my random cast of money, because I knew no better, and was sure to have more in a very little time. And the children of the pump came to see me go away, through streets of a mile and a half, I should think; and they carried my things looking after one another, so that none could run away. And being forbidden at the platform gate, for want of respectability, they set up a cheer, and I waved my hat, and promised, amid great applause, to come back with it full of sixpences.

CHAPTER XXX.

COCKS AND COXCOMBS.

Major Hockin brought the only fly as yet to be found in Bruntsea, to meet me at Newport, where the railway ended at present, for want of further encouragement.

'Very soon you go,' he cried out to the bulkheads, or buffers, or whatever are the things that close the career of a land-engine. 'Station-master, you are very wise in putting in your very best cabbage plants there. You understand your own Company. Well done! If I were to offer you a shilling a-piece for those young early Yorks, what would you say now?'

'Weel, a think I should say nah, Sir,' the Scotch station-master made answer with a grin, while he pulled off his cap of office, and put on a dissolute Glengarry; 'they are a veery fine young kail, that always pays for planting.'

'The villain!' said the Major as I jumped into the fly. 'However, I suppose he does quite right. Set a thief to watch a thief. The Company are big rogues; and he tries to be a bigger. We shall cut through his garden in about three months, just when his cabbages are getting firm, and their value will exceed that of pine-apples. The surveyor will come down and certify, and the "damage to crops" will be at least five pounds, when they have no right to sow even mustard and cress; and a saucepan would hold all the victuals on the land.'

From this I perceived that my host was as full of his speculative schemes as ever. And soon he made the driver of the one-horse fly turn aside from the unfenced road, and take the turf. 'Coachman,' he cried, 'just drive along the railway; you won't have the chance much longer.'

There was no sod turned yet, and no rod set up; but the driver seemed to know what was meant, and took us over the springy turf where once had run the river. And the salt breath of the sea came over the pebble-ridge,

full of appetite and briskness, after so much London.

'It is one of the saddest things I ever heard of,' Major Hockin began to say to me. 'Poor Shovelin! poor Shovelin! A man of large capital—the very thing we want—it might have been the making of this place. I have very little doubt that I must have brought him to see our great natural advantages—the beauty of the situation, the salubrity of the air, the absence of all clay, or marsh, or noxious deposit, the bright crisp turf, and the noble underlie of chalk, which (if you perceive my meaning) cannot retain any damp, but transmits it into sweet natural wells—why, driver, where the devil are you driving us?'

'No fear, your honour. I know every trick of it. It won't come over the wheels, I do believe; and it does all the good in the world to his sand-cracks. Whoa-ho, my boy, then! And the young lady's feet might go up upon the cushion, if her boots is thin, Sir; and Mr. Rasper will excuse of it.'

'What the'—something hot—'do you

mean, Sir?' the Major roared over the water, which seemed to be deepening as we went on. 'Pull out this instant, pull out, I tell you, or you shall have three months' hard labour. May I be d——d now—my dear, I beg your pardon for speaking with such sincerity—I simply mean may I go straightway to the devil, if I don't put this fellow on the treadmill. Oh, you can pull out now, then, can you?'

'If your honour pleases, I never did pull in,' the poor driver answered, being frightened at the excitement of the lord of the manor. 'My orders was, Miss, to drive along the line coming on now just to Bruntsea, and keep in the middle of that same I did, and this here little wet is a haxident—a haxident of the full moon, I do assure you, and the wind coming over the sea, as you might say. These pebbles is too round, Miss, to stick to one another, you couldn't expect it of them; and sometimes the water here and there comes a'leaking like, through the bottom. I have seed it so, ever since I can remember.'

'I don't believe a word of it,' the Major

said, as he waited a little for the vehicle to drain, and I made a nosegay of the bright sea-flowers. 'Tell me no lies, Sir; you belong to the West Bruntseyans, and you have driven us into a vile bog, to scare me. They have bribed you. I see the whole of it. Tell me the truth, and you shall have five shillings.'

The driver looked over the marshes, as if he had never received such an offer before. Five shillings for a falsehood would have seemed the proper thing, and have called for a balance of considerations, and made a demand upon his energies. But to earn five shillings by the truth had never fallen to his luck before; and he turned to me because I smiled, and he said, 'Will you taste the water, Miss?'

'Bless me!' cried the Major, 'now, I never thought of that. Common people have such ways about things they are used to! I might have stood here for a month and never have thought of that way to settle it. Ridiculously simple—give me a taste, Erema. Ah, that is the real beauty of our coast, my dear! The strongest proportion of the saline element—I

should know the taste of it anywhere. No sea-weed, no fishy particles, no sludge, no beards of oysters. The pure, uncontaminated, perfect brine, that sets every male and female on his legs, varicose, orthopædic—I forget their scientifics—but I know the smack of it.'

'Certainly,' I said, 'it is beautifully salt. It will give you an appetite for dinner, Major Hockin. I could drink a pint of it, after all that smoke. But don't you think it is a serious think for the sea itself to come pouring through the bottom of this pebble-bank in this way?'

'Not at all. No, I rather like it. It opens up many strictly practical ideas. It adds very much to the value of the land. For instance, a "salt-lick," as your sweet Yankees call it—and set up an infirmary for foot and mouth disease. And better still, the baths, the baths, my dear! No expense for piping, or pumping, or anything. Only place your marble at the proper level, and twice a day you have the grand salubrious sparkling influx of ocean's self, self-filtered, and by its own operation

permeated with a fine silicious element. What foreign mud could compete with such a bath?'

'But supposing there should come too much of it,' I said; 'and wash both the baths and the bathers away?'

'Such an idea is ridiculous. It can be adjusted to a nicety. I am very glad I happened to observe this thing, this—this noble phenomenon. I shall speak to Montague about it at once, before I am half-an-hour older. My dear, you have made a conquest; I quite forgot to tell you; but never mind that for the present. Driver, here is half-a-crown for you. Your master will put down the fly to my account. He owes me a heriot. I shall claim his best beast, the moment he gets one without a broken wind.'

As the Major spoke he got out at his own door with all his wonted alacrity; but instead of offering me his hand, as he always had done in London, he skipped up his nine steps, on purpose (as I saw) that somebody else might come down for me. And this was Sir Montague Hockin; as I feared was only too likely, from

what had been said. If I had even suspected that this gentleman was at Bruntlands, I would have done my utmost to stay where I was, in spite of all absence of money. Betsy would gladly have allowed me to remain, without paying even a farthing, until it should become convenient. Pride had forbidden me to speak of this; but I would have got over that pride, much rather than meet this Sir Montague Hockin thus. Some instinct told me to avoid him altogether; and having so little now of any other guidance, I attached, perhaps, foolish importance to that.

'However, it was not the part of a lady to be rude to anyone through instinct; and I knew already that, in England, young women are not quite such masters of their own behaviour as in the Far West they are allowed to be. And so I did my best that, even in my eyes, he should not see how vexed I was at meeting him. And soon it appeared that this behaviour, however painful to me, was no less wise than good; because, both with my host and hostess, this new visitor was already at the summit of all

good graces. He had conquered the Major by admiration of all his schemes and upshots, and even offering glimmers of the needful money in the distance; and Mrs. Hockin lay quite at his feet, ever since he had opened a hamper, and produced a pair of frizzled fowls, creatures of an extraordinary aspect, toothed all over like a dandelion plant, with every feather sticking inside out. When I saw them, I tried for my life not to laugh, and, biting my lips very hard, quite succeeded; until the cook opened up a pair of sleepy eyes, covered with comb and very sad inversions, and, glancing with complacency at his wife (who stood beneath him, even more turned inside out), capered with his twiggy legs, and gave a long sad crow. Mrs. Hockin looked at him with intense delight.

'Erema, is it possible that you laugh? I thought that you never laughed, Erema. At any rate, if you ever do indulge, you might choose a fitter opportunity, I think. You have spoiled his demonstration altogether—see, he does not understand such unkindness—and it is the very first he has uttered since he came! Oh, poor Fluffsky!'

'I am very, very sorry. But how was I to help it? I would not, on any account, have stopped him, if I had known he was so sensitive. Fluffsky, do please to begin again.'

'These beggars are nothing at all, I can assure you,' said Sir Montague, coming to my aid, when Fluffsky spurned all our prayers for one more crow. 'Mrs. Hockin, if you really would like to have a fowl that even Lady Clara Crowcombe has not got, you shall have it in a week, or a fortnight, or at any rate a month; if I can manage it. They are not to be had, except through certain channels; and the fellows who write the poultry books have never even heard of them.'

'Oh, how delighted I shall be! Lady Clara despises all her neighbours so. But do they lay eggs? Half the use of keeping poultry, when you never kill them, is to get an egg for breakfast; and Major Hockin looks round and says, "Now, is this our own?" And I cannot say that it is; and I am vexed with the books, and he begins to laugh at me. People said it was for want of chalk; but they walk upon nothing but chalk, as you can see.'

'And their food, Mrs. Hockin. They are walking upon that. Starve them for a week, and 40 eggs at least will reward you for stern discipline.'

But all this little talk I only tell, to show how good and soft Mrs. Hockin was; and her husband, in spite of all his self-opinion, and resolute talk about money, and manorial dues, in his way, perhaps, was even less to be trusted to get his cash out of any poor and honest man.

On the very day after my return from London, I received a letter from 'Colonel Gundry' (as we always called the Sawyer now, through his kinship to the Major), and, as it cannot easily be put into less compass, I may as well give his very words :—

'Dear Miss Rema,

'Your last favour to hand with thanks. Everything is going on all right with us. The mill is built up and goes better than ever; more orders on hand than we can get through. We have not cracked the big nugget yet. Expect the Government to take him at a trifle

below value, for Washington Museum. Must have your consent; but, for my part, would rather let him go there than break him. Am ready to lose a few dollars upon him, particularly as he might crack up all quartzy in the middle. They offer to take him by weight, at three dollars and a half per pound below standard. Please say if agreeable.

'I fear, my dear, that there are bad times coming for all of us here in this part. Not about money, but a long sight worse; bad will, and contention, and rebellion, perhaps. What we hear concerning it is not much here; but, even here, thoughts are very much divided. Ephraim takes a different view from mine, which is not a right thing for a grandson to do; and neighbour Sylvester goes with him. The Lord send agreement and concord among us; but, if He doeth so, He must change his mind first; for every man is borrowing his neighbour's gun.

'If there is anything that you can do, to turn Ephraim back to his duty, my dear, I am sure that, for love of us, you will do it. If

Firm was to run away from me now, and go fighting on behalf of slavery, I never should care more for nought upon this side of Jordan; and the new mill might go to Jericho; though it does look uncommon handsome now, I can assure you, and tears through its work like a tiger.

'Noting symptoms in your last of the price of things in England, and having carried over some to your account, enclosed, please to find a bill for five hundred dollars, though not likely to be wanted yet. Have a care of your money, my dear; but pay your way handsome, as a Castlewood should do. Jowler goes his rounds twice a day, looking for you; and somebody else never hangs his hat up without casting one eye at the corner you know. Sylvester's girl was over here last week, dashing about as usual. If Firm goes South, he may have her, for aught I care, and never see saw-mill again. But I hope that the Lord will spare my old days such disgrace and tribulation.

'About you know what, my dear, be not over anxious. I have been young, and now am

old, as the holy Psalmist says; and the more I see of the ways of men, the less I verily think of them. Their good-esteem, their cap-in-hand, their fair fame, as they call it, goes by accident, and fortune, the whim of the moment, and the way the clever ones have of tickling them. A great man laughs at the flimsy of it; and a good one goes to his conscience. Your father saw these things at their value. I have often grieved that you cannot see them so; but perhaps I have liked you none the worse, my dear.

'Don't forget about going South. A word from you may stop him. It is almost the only hope I have; and even that may be too late. Suan Isco and Martin send messages. The flowers are on your father's grave. I have got a large order for pine-cradles in great haste, but have time to be, 'Truly yours,

'SAMPSON GUNDRY.'

That letter, while it relieved me in one way, from the want of money, cost me more than ten times five hundred dollars' worth of anxiety.

The Sawyer had written to me twice ere this —kind, simple letters, but of no importance, except for their goodness and affection. But now it was clear that, when he wrote this letter, he must have been sadly put out and upset. His advice to me was beyond all value ; but he seemed to have kept none at home for himself. He was carried quite out of his large, staid ways, when he wrote those bitter words about poor Firm—the very apple of his eye, as the holy Psalmist says. And, knowing the obstinacy of them both, I dreaded clash between them.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ADRIFT.

Having got money enough to last long with one brought up to simplicity, and resolved to have nothing to do for awhile with charity or furnished lodgings (what though kept by one's own nurse), I cast about now for good reason to be off from all the busy works at Bruntsea. So soon after such a tremendous blow, it was impossible for me to push my own little troubles and concerns upon good Mr. Shovelin's family, much as I longed to know what was to become of my father's will, if anything. But my desire to be doing something, or, at least, to get away for a time from Bruntsea, was largely increased by Sir Montague Hockin's strange behaviour towards me.

That young man, if still he could be called young—which, at my age, scarcely seemed to

be his right, for he must have been ten years older than poor Firm—began more and more every day to come after me, just when I wanted to be quite alone. There was nothing more soothing to my thoughts and mind (the latter getting quiet from the former, I suppose) than for the whole of me to rest awhile in such a little scollop of the shingle as a new-moon tide, in little crescents, leaves just below high water-mark. And now it was new-moon tide again, a fortnight after the flooding of our fly by the activity of the full moon; and, feeling how I longed to understand these things—which seemed to be denied to all who are of the same sex as the moon herself—I sat in a very nice nick, where no wind could make me look worse than nature willed. But of my own looks I never did think twice, unless there was anyone to speak of such a subject.

Here I was sitting in the afternoon of a gentle July day, wondering by what energy of nature all these countless pebbles were produced, and not even a couple to be found among them fit to lie side by side and purely tally with

each other. Right and left, for miles and miles, millions multiplied into millions; yet I might hold any one in my palm, and be sure that it never had been there before. And of the quiet wavelets even, taking their own time and manner, in default of will of wind, all to come and call attention to their doom by arching over, and endeavouring to make froth, were any two in sound and size, much more in shape and shade, alike? Every one had its own little business, of floating pop-weed, or foam bubbles, or of blistered light to do; and every one, having done it, died, and subsided into its successor.

'A trifle sentimental, are we?' cried a lively voice behind me; and the waves of my soft reflections fell, and instead of them stood Sir Montague Hockin, with a hideous parasol.

I never received him with worse grace, often as I had repulsed him; but he was one of those people who think that women are all whims and ways.

'I grieve to intrude upon large ideas,' he said, as I rose and looked at him; 'but I act

under positive orders now. A lady knows what is best for a lady. Mrs. Hockin has been looking from the window, and she thinks that you ought not to be sitting in the sun like this. There has been a case of sunstroke at Southbourne—a young lady meditating under the cliff—and she begs you to accept this palm-leaf.'

I thought of the many miles I had wandered under the fierce Californian sun; but I would not speak to him of that. 'Thank you,' I said; it was very kind of her to think of it, and of you to do it. But will it be safe for you to go back without it?'

'Oh, why should I do so?' he answered, with a tone of mock pathos which provoked me always, though I never could believe it to be meant in ridicule of me, for that would have been too low a thing; and, besides, I never spoke so. 'Could you bear to see me slain by the shafts of the sun? Miss Castlewood, this parasol is amply large for both of us.'

I would not answer him in his own vein, because I never liked his vein at all; though I

was not so entirely possessed as to want everybody to be like myself.

'Thank you; I mean to stay here,' I said; 'you may either leave the parasol or take it, whichever will be less troublesome. At any rate, I shall not use it.'

A gentleman, according to my ideas, would have bowed and gone upon his way; but Sir Montague Hockin would have no rebuff. He seemed to look upon me as a child, such as average English girls, fresh from little schools, would be. Nothing more annoyed me, after all my thoughts, and dream of some power in myself, than this.

'Perhaps I might tell you a thing or two,' he said, while I kept gazing at some fishing-boats, and sat down again, as a sign for him to go; 'a little thing or two, of which you have no idea, even in your most lonely musings, which might have a very deep interest for you. Do you think that I came to this hole to see the sea? Or that fussy old muff of a Major's doings?'

'Perhaps you would like me to tell him

your opinion of his intellect and great plans,' I answered. 'And after all his kindness to you!'

'You never will do that,' he said; 'because you are a lady, and will not repeat what is said in confidence. I could help you materially in your great object, if you would only make a friend of me.'

'And what would your own object be? The pure anxiety to do right?'

'Partly, and I might say, mainly that; also an ambition for your good opinion, which seems so inaccessible. But you will think me selfish if I even hint at any condition of any kind. Everybody I have ever met with likes me, except Miss Castlewood.'

As he spoke, he glanced down his fine amber-coloured beard, shining in the sun, and even in the sun showing no gray hair (for a reason which Mrs. Hockin told me afterwards), and he seemed to think it hard for a man with such a beard should be valued lightly.

'I do not see why we should talk,' I said, 'about either likes or dislikes. Only, if you

have anything to tell, I shall be very much obliged to you.'

This gentleman looked at me in a way which I have often observed in England. A general idea there prevails that the free and enlightened natives of the West are in front of those here in intelligence, and, to some extent, therefore, in dishonesty. But there must be many cases where the two are not the same.

'No,' I replied, while he was looking at his buttons, which had every British animal upon them; 'I mean nothing more than the simple thing I say. If you ought to tell me anything, tell it. I am accustomed to straightforward people. But they disappoint one by their never knowing anything.'

'But I know something,' he answered, with a nod of grave, mysterious import; 'and perhaps I will tell you some day, when admitted, if ever I have such an honour, to some little degree of friendship.'

'Oh, please not to think of yourself,' I exclaimed, in a manner which must have amused him. 'In such a case, the last thing that you

should do is that. Think only of what is right and honourable, and your duty towards a lady. Also your duty to the laws of your country. I am not at all sure that you ought not to be arrested. But perhaps it is nothing at all, after all; only something invented to provoke me.'

'In that case I can only drop the subject,' he answered with that stern gleam of the eyes which I had observed before, and detested; 'I was also to tell you that we dine to-day an hour before the usual time, that my cousin may go out in the boat for whiting. The sea will be as smooth as glass. Perhaps you will come with us.'

With these words, he lifted his hat and went off, leaving me in a most uncomfortable state, as he must have known if he had even tried to think. For I could not get the smallest idea what he meant; and, much as I tried to believe that he must be only pretending, for reasons of his own, to have something important to tell me, scarcely was it possible to be contented so. A thousand absurd imaginations began to torment me as to what he meant. He

lived in London so much, for instance, that he had much quicker chance of knowing whatever there was to know; again, he was a man of the world, full of short, sharp sagacity, and able to penetrate what I could not; then, again, he kept a large account with Shovelin, Wayte, and Shovelin, as Major Hockin chanced to say; and I knew not that a banker's reserve is much deeper than his deposit; moreover—which, to my mind, was almost stronger proof than anything—Sir Montague Hockin was of smuggling pedigree, and likely to be skilful in illicit runs of knowledge.

However, in spite of all this uneasiness, not another word would I say to him about it, waiting rather for him to begin again upon it. But, though I waited and waited, as, perhaps, with any other person I scarcely could have done, he would not condescend to give me even another look about it.

Disliking that gentleman more and more for his supercilious conduct, and certainty of subduing me, I naturally turned again to my good host and hostess. But here there was

very little help or support to be obtained at present. Major Hockin was laying the foundations of 'The Bruntsea Assembly Rooms, Literary Institute, Mutual Improvement Association, Lyceum, and Baths, from sixpence upward;' while Mrs. Hockin had a hatch of 'White Sultans,' or, rather, a prolonged sitting of eggs, fondly hoped to hatch at last from having cost so much, like a chicken-hearted conference. Much as I sorrowed at her disappointment, for the sitting cost twelve guineas, I could not feel quite guiltless of a petty and ignoble smile, when, after hoping against hope, upon the thirtieth day, she placed her beautifully sound eggs in a large bowl of warm water, in which they floated as calmly as if their price was a penny a dozen. The poor lady tried to believe that they were spinning with vitality; but at last she allowed me to break one, and lo, it had been half boiled by the advertiser. 'This is very sad,' cried Mrs. Hockin; and the patient old hen, who was come in a basket of hay to see the end of it, echoed with a cluck that sentiment.

These things being so, I was left once more to follow my own guidance, which had seemed, in the main, to be my fortune ever since my father died. For one day Mr. Shovelin had appeared, to my great joy and comfort, as a guide and guardian; but, alas, for one day only! And, except for his good advice and kind paternal conduct to me, it seemed at present an unlucky thing that I had ever discovered him. Not only through deep sense of loss and real sorrow for him, but also because Major Hockin, however good, and great, and generous, took it unreasonably into his head that I threw him over, and threw myself (as with want of fine taste he expressed it) into the arms of the banker. This hurt me very much, and I felt that Major Hockin could never have spoken so hastily unless his hair had been originally red; and so it might be detected, even now, where it survived itself, though blanched where he brushed it into that pretentious ridge. Sometimes I liked that man when his thoughts were large and liberal; but no sooner had he said a fine, brave thing than he

seemed to have an afterthought not to go too far with it; just as he had done about the poor robbed woman from the steerage and the young man who pulled out his guinea. I paid him for my board and lodging, upon a scale settled by Uncle Sam himself, at Californian prices; therefore I am under no obligation to conceal his foibles. But, take him altogether, he was good, and brave, and just, though unable, from absence of inner light, to be to me what Uncle Sam had been.

When I perceived that the Major condemned my simple behaviour in London, and (if I may speak it, as I said it to myself) 'blew hot and cold' in half a minute—hot when I thought of any good things to be done, and cold as soon as he became the man to do them—also, when I remembered what a chronic plague was now at Bruntsea, in the shape of Sir Montague, who went to and fro, but could never be trusted to be far off, I resolved to do what I had long been thinking of, and believed that my guardian, if he had lived another day, would have recommended. I resolved to go

and see Lord Castlewood, my father's first cousin, and friend in need.

When I asked my host and hostess what they thought of this, they both declared that it was the very thing they were at the point of advising, which, however, they had forborne from doing, because I never took advice. At this, as being such a great exaggeration, I could not help smiling seriously; but I could not accept their sage opinion, that, before I went to see my kinsman, I ought to write and ask his leave to do so. For that would have made it quite a rude thing to call, as I must still have done, if he should decline beforehand to receive me. Moreover, it would look as if I sought an invitation, while only wanting an interview. Therefore, being now full of money again, I hired the flyman who had made us taste the water, and taking train at Newport, and changing at two or three places as ordered, crossed many little streams, and came to a fair river, which proved to be the Thames itself, a few miles above Reading.

In spite of all the larger lessons of travel,

adventure, and tribulation, my heart was throbbing with some rather small feelings, as for the first time I drew near to the home of my forefathers. I should have been sorry to find it ugly or mean, or lying in a hole, or even modern or insignificant; and, when none of these charges could be brought against it, I was filled with highly discreditable pain that Providence had not seen fit to issue me into this world in the masculine form; in which case, this fine property would, according to the rules of mankind, have been mine. However, I was very soon ashamed of such ideas, and sat down on a bank to dispel them with the free and fair view around me.

The builder of that house knew well both where to place and how to shape it, so as not to spoil the site. It stood near the brow of a bosoming hill, which sheltered it, both with wood and clevice, from the rigour and fury of the north and east; while in front the sloping foreground widened large soft lap of green. In bays and waves of rolling grass, promontoried, here and there, by jutting copse or massive tree,

and jotted now and then with cattle as calm as boats at anchor, the range of sunny upland fell to the reedy fringe and clustered silence of deep river meadows. Here the Thames, in pleasant bends of gentleness and courtesy, yet with will of its own ways, being now a plenteous river, spreads low music, and holds mirror to the woods, and hills, and fields, casting afar a broad still gleam, and on the banks presenting tremulous infinitude of flash.

Now, these things touched me all the more, because none of them belonged to me; and, after thus trying to enlarge my views, I got up with much better heart, and hurried on to have it over, whatever it might be. A girl brought up in the real English way would have spent her last shilling to drive up to the door in the fly at the station—a most sad machine—but I thought it no disgrace to go in a more becoming manner.

One scarcely ever acts up to the force of situation; and I went as quietly into that house as if it were Betsy Bowen's. If anybody had been rude to me, or asked who I was, or a little thing of that sort, my spirit might have been

up at once, and found, as usually happens then, good reason to go down afterwards. But happily there was nothing of the kind. An elderly man, without any gaudy badges, opened the door very quietly, and begged my pardon, before I spoke, for asking me to speak softly. It was one of his lordship's very worst days, and when he was so, every sound seemed to reach him. I took the hint, and did not speak at all, but followed him over deep matting into a little room to which he showed me. And then I gave him a little note, written before I left Bruntsea, and asked him whether he thought that his master was well enough to attend to it.

He looked at me in a peculiar manner, for he had known my father well, having served from his youth in the family; but he only asked whether my message was important. I answered that it was, but that I would wait for another time rather than do any harm. But he said that, however ill his master was, nothing provoked him more than to find that anything was neglected through it. And before I could speak again he was gone with my letter to Lord Castlewood.

CHAPTER XXXII.

AT HOME.

Some of the sad and troublous things which had visited me so often began while I was waiting thus to intrude upon my memory. Such dark figures always seem to make the most of a nervous moment, when solid reason yields to flattering fear and small misgivings. There anybody seems to lie, as a stranded sailor lies, at the foot of perpendicular cliffs of most inhuman humanity, with all the world frowning down over the crest, and no one to throw a rope down. Often and often had I felt this want of anyone to help me, but the only way out of it seemed to be to do my best to help myself.

Even now I had little hope, having been so often dashed, and knowing that my father's cousin possessed no share of my father's

strength. He might, at the utmost, give good advice, and help me with kind feeling; but if he had wanted to do more, surely he might have tried ere now. But my thoughts about this were cut short by a message that he would be glad to see me, and I followed the servant to the library.

Here I found Lord Castlewood, sitting in a high-backed chair, uncushioned and uncomfortable. When he saw me near him, he got up, and took my hand, and looked at me; and I was pleased to find his face well-meaning, brave, and generous. But even to rise from his chair was plainly no small effort to him, and he leaned upon a staff or crutch, as he offered me a small white hand.

'Miss Castlewood,' he said, with a very weak yet clear and silvery voice, 'for many years I have longed in vain and sought in vain to hear of you. I have not escaped all self-reproach through my sense of want of energy; yet, such as I am, I have done my best, or I do my best to think so.'

'I am sure you have,' I replied, without

thinking, knowing his kindness to my father, and feeling the shame of my own hot words to Mr. Shovelin about him. 'I owe you more gratitude than I can tell, for your goodness to my dear father. I am not come now to trouble you, but because it was my duty.'

While I was speaking, he managed to lead me, feebly as himself could walk, to a deep chair for reading, or some such use, whereof I have had few chances. And in every step, and word, and gesture, I recognised that foreign grace which true-born Britons are proud to despise on both sides of the Atlantic. And, being in the light, I watched him well, because I am not a foreigner.

In the clear summer light of the westering sun (which is better for accurate uses than the radiance of the morning) I saw a firm, calm face, which might in good health have been powerful, a face which might be called the moonlight image of my father's. I could not help turning away to cry, and suspicion fled for ever.

'My dear young cousin,' he said, as soon as

I was fit to speak to; 'your father trusted me, and so must you. You may think that I have forgotten you, or done very little to find you out. It was no indifference, no forgetfulness; I have not been able to work myself, and I have had very deep trouble of my own.'

He leaned on his staff, and looked down at me, for I had sat down when thus overcome, and I knew that the forehead and eyes were those of a learned and intellectual man. How I knew this it is impossible to say, for I never had met with such a character as this, unless it were the Abbé of Flêchon, when I was only fourteen years old, and valued his great skill in spinning a top tenfold more than all his deep learning. Lord Castlewood had long, silky hair, falling in curls of silver grey upon either side of his beautiful forehead, and the gaze of his soft, dark eyes was sad, gentle, yet penetrating. Weak health and almost constant pain had chastened his delicate features to an expression almost feminine, though firm thin lips and rigid lines showed masculine will and fortitude. And

when he spoke of his own trouble (which, perhaps, he would not not have done except for consolation's sake), I knew that he meant something even more grievous than bodily anguish.

'It is hard,' he said, 'that you, so young, and healthy, and full of high spirit as you are (unless your face belies you), should begin the best years of your life, as common opinion puts such things, in such a cloud of gloom and shame.'

'There is no shame at all,' I answered, 'and if there is gloom I am used to that; and so was my father for years and years. What is my trouble compared with his?'

'Your trouble is nothing when compared with his, so far as regards the mere weight of it; but he was a strong man to carry his load —you are a young and a sensitive woman. The burden may even be worse for you. Now tell me all about yourself, and what has brought you to me.'

His voice was so quiet and soothing that I seemed to rest beneath it. He had not spoken

once of religion or the will of God, nor plied me at all with those pious allusions which even to the reverent mind are like illusions when so urged. Lord Castlewood had too deep a sense of the will God to know what it is; and he looked at me wistfully, as at one who might have worse experience of it.

Falling happily under his influence, as his clear, kind eyes met mine, I told him everything I could think of about my father and myself, and all I wanted to do next, and how my heart and soul were set upon getting to the bottom of everything. And while I spoke with spirit or softness, or, I fear, sometimes with hate, I could not help seeing that he was surprised, but not wholly displeased, with my energy. And then, when all was exhausted, came the old question I had heard so often, and found so hard to answer—

'And what do you propose to do next, Erema?'

'To go to the very place itself,' I said, speaking strongly under challenge, though quite unresolved about such a thing before; 'to live

in the house where my father lived, and my mother and all of the family died; and from day to day to search every corner and fish up every bit of evidence, until I get hold of the true man at last, of the villain who did it—who did it, and left my father and all the rest of us to be condemned and die for it.'

'Erema,' replied my cousin, as he had told me now to call him, 'you are too impetuous for such work, and it is wholly unfit for you. For such a task, persons of trained sagacity and keen observation are needed. And after all these eighteen years, or nearly nineteen now it must be, there cannot be anything to discover there.'

'But if I like, may I go there, cousin, if only to satisfy my own mind? I am miserable now at Bruntsea, and Sir Montague Hockin wears me out.'

'Sir Montague Hockin!' Lord Castlewood exclaimed; 'why, you did not tell me that he was there. Wherever he is, you should not be.'

'I forgot to speak of him; he does not live

there, but is continually to and fro for bathing, or fishing, or rabbit-shooting, or any other pretext. And he makes the place very unpleasant to me, kind as the Major and Mrs. Hockin are, because I can never make him out at all.'

'Do not try to do so,' my cousin answered, looking at me earnestly; 'be content to know nothing of him, my dear. If you can put up with a very dull house, and a host who is even duller, come here and live with me, as your father would have wished, and as I, your nearest relative, now ask and beg of you.'

This was wonderfully kind, and for a moment I felt tempted. Lord Castlewood being an elderly man, and, as the head of our family, my natural protector, there could be nothing wrong, and there might be much that was good, in such an easy arrangement. But, on the other hand, it seemed to me that after this my work would languish. Living in comfort and prosperity under the roof of my forefathers, beyond any doubt I should begin to fall into habits of luxury, to take

to the love of literature, which I knew to be latent within me, to lose the clear, strong, practical sense of the duty for which I, the last of seven, was spared, and in some measure, perhaps, by wanderings and by hardships fitted. And then I thought of my host's weak health, continual pain (the signs of which were hardly repressed even while he was speaking), and probably also his secluded life. Was it fair to force him, by virtue of his inborn kindness and courtesy, to come out of his privileges, and deal with me, who could not altogether be in any place a mere nobody? And so I refused his offer.

'I am very much obliged to you indeed,' I said; 'but I think you might be sorry for it. I will come and stop with you every now and then, when your health is better, and you ask me. But to live here altogether would not do; I should like it too well, and do nothing else.'

'Perhaps you are right,' he replied, with the air of one who cares little for anything, which is to me the most melancholy thing, and worse than any distress almost; 'you are very

young, my dear, and years should be allowed to pass before you know what full-grown sorrow is. You have had enough, for your age, of it. You had better not live in this house; it is not a house for cheerfulness.'

'Then if I must neither live here nor at Bruntsea,' I asked, with sudden remonstrance, feeling as if everybody desired to be quit of me or to worry me; 'to what place in all the world am I to go, unless it is back to America? I will go at once to Shoxford, and take lodgings of my own.'

'Perhaps you had better wait a little while,' Lord Castlewood answered gently, 'although I would much rather have you at Shoxford than where you are at present. But please to remember, my good Erema, that you cannot go to Shoxford all alone. I have a most faithful and trusty man—the one who opened the door to you. He has been here before his remembrance. He disdains me still as compared with your father. Will you have him to superintend you? I scarcely see how you can do any good; but if you do go you must go openly, and as your father's daughter.'

'I have no intention whatever of going in any other way, Lord Castlewood; but perhaps,' I continued, 'it would be as well to make as little stir as possible. Of an English village I know nothing but the little I have seen at Bruntsea, but there they make a very great fuss about anyone who comes down with a man-servant.'

'To be sure,' replied my cousin with a smile; 'they would not be true Britons otherwise. Perhaps you would do better without Stixon; but of course you must not go alone. Could you by any means persuade your old nurse Betsy to go with you?'

'How good of you to think of it!—how wise you are!' I really could not help saying, as I gazed at his delicate, noble face. 'I am sure that if Betsy can come, she will; though of course she must be compensated well for the waste all her lodgers will make of it. They are very wicked, and eat most dreadfully if she even takes one day's holiday. What do you think they even do? She has told me with tears in her eyes of it. They are all allowed a pat

of butter, a penny roll, and two sardines for breakfast. No sooner do they know that her back is turned——'

'Erema!' cried my cousin, with some surprise; and being so recalled I was ashamed. But I never could help taking interest in very, very little things indeed, until my own common sense, or somebody else, came to tell me what a child I was. However, I do believe that Uncle Sam liked me all the better for this fault.

'My dear, I did not mean to blame you,' Lord Castlewood said, most kindly; 'it must be a great relief for you to look on at other people. But tell me—or rather, since you have told me almost everything you know—let me, if only in one way I can help you, help you at at least in that way.'

Knowing that he must mean money, I declined, from no false pride, but a set resolve to work out my work, if possible, through my own resources. But I promised to apply to him at once, if scarcity should again befall me, as had happened lately. And then I longed to ask

him why he seemed to have so low an opinion of Sir Montague Hockin. That question, however, I feared to put, because it might not be a proper one, and also because my cousin had spoken in a very strange tone, as if of some private dislike or reserve on that subject. Moreover, it was too evident that I had tried his courtesy long enough. From time to time pale shades of bodily pain, and then hot flushes, had flitted across his face, like clouds on a windy summer evening. And more than once he had glanced at the timepiece, not to hurry me, but as if he dreaded its announcements. It was a beautiful clock, and struck with a silvery sound every quarter of an hour. And now, as I rose to say good-bye to catch my evening train, it struck a quarter to five, and my cousin stood up, with his weight upon his staff, and looked at me with an inexpressible depth of weary misery.

'I have only a few minutes left,' he said, 'during which I can say anything. My time is divided into two sad parts: the time when I am capable of very little, and the time when I am

capable of nothing; and the latter part is twice the length of the other. For sixteen hours of every day, far better had I be dead than living, so far as our own little insolence may judge. But I speak of it only to excuse bad manners, and perhaps I show worse by doing so. I shall not be able to see you again until to-morrow morning. Do not go; they will arrange all that. Send a note to Major Hockin by Stixon's boy. Stixon and Mrs. Price will see to your comfort, if those who are free from pain require any other comfort. Forgive me; I did not mean to be rude. Sometimes I cannot help giving way.'

Less enviable than the poorest slave, Lord Castlewood sank upon his hard, stiff chair, and straightened his long narrow hands upon his knees, and set his thin lips in straight blue lines. Each hand was as rigid as the ivory handle of an umbrella or walking-stick; and his lips were like clamped wire. This was his regular way of preparing for the onset of the night, so that no grimace, no cry, no moan, or other token of fierce agony should be wrung from him.

'My Lord will catch it stiff to-night,' said Mr. Stixon, who came as I rang, and then led me away to the drawing-room; 'he always have it ten times worse after any talking or anything to upset him like. And so then, Miss—excuse a humble servant—did I understand from him that you was the Captain's own daughter?'

'Yes; but surely your master wants you—he is in such dreadful pain. Do please to go to him, and do something.'

'There is nothing to be done, Miss,' Stixon answered, with calm resignation; 'he is bound to stay so for sixteen hours, and then he eases off again. But bless my heart, Miss—excuse me in your presence—his lordship is thoroughly used to it. It is my certain knowledge that for seven years now he has never had seven minutes free from pain—seven minutes all of a heap, I mean. Some do say, Miss, as the Lord doeth everything according to His righteousness, that the reason is not so very far to seek.'

I asked him what he meant, though I ought, perhaps, to have put a stop to his loquacity;

and he pretended not to hear, which made me ask him all the more.

'A better man never lived than my lord,' he answered, with a little shock at my misprision; 'but it has been said among censoorous persons that nobody ever had no luck as came in suddenly to a property and a high state of life, on the top of the heads of a family of seven.'

'What a poor superstition!' I cried, though I was not quite sure of its being a wicked one; 'but what is your master's malady, Stixon? Surely there might be something done to relieve his violent pain, even if there is no real cure for it?'

'No, Miss, nothing can be done. The doctors have exorced themselves. They tried this, that, and the other, but nature only flew worse against them. 'Tis a thing as was never heard of till the Constitooshon was knocked on the head and to pieces by the Reform Bill. And though they couldn't cure it, they done what they could do, Miss. They discovered a very good name for it—they christened it the "Newrager!"'

CHAPTER XXXIII.

LORD CASTLEWOOD.

In the morning, when I was called again to see my afflicted cousin—Stixon junior having gladly gone to explain things for me at Bruntsea—little as I knew of any bodily pain (except hunger, or thirst, or weariness, and once in my life a head-ache), I stood before Lord Castlewood with a deference and humility such as I had never felt before towards any human being. Not only because he bore perpetual pain in the two degrees of night and day—the day being dark, and the night jet-black—without a murmur or an evil word; not only because through the whole of this he had kept his mind clear and his love of knowledge bright; not even because he had managed, like Job, to love God through the whole of it. All these were good reasons for very great and very high respect of any

man; and when there was no claim whatever on his part to any such feeling it needs must come. But when I learned another thing, high respect at once became what might be called deep reverence. And this came to pass in a simple, and, as anyone must confess, quite inevitable way.

It was not to be supposed that I could sit the whole of my first evening in that house without a soul to speak to. So far as my dignity and sense of right permitted, I wore out Mr. Stixon, so far as he would go, not asking him anything that the very worst-minded person could call 'inquisitive,' but allowing him to talk, as he seemed to like to do, while he waited upon me, and alternately lamented my hapless history and my hopeless want of taste.

'Ah, your father, the Captain, now, he would have knowed what this is! You've no right to his eyes, Miss Erema, without his tongue and palate. No more of this, Miss! and done for you a-purpose! Well, cook will be put out and no mistake! I better not let her see it go down anyhow.' And the worthy man tearfully

put some dainty by, perhaps without any view to his own supper.

'Lord Castlewood spoke to me about a Mrs. Price—the housekeeper, is she not?' I asked at last, being so accustomed to like what I could get that the number of dishes wearied me.

'Oh, yes, Miss,' said Stixon very shortly, as if that description exhausted Mrs. Price.

'If she is not too busy, I should like to see her as soon as these things are all taken away. I mean if she is not a stranger, and if she would like to see me?'

'No new-comers here,' Mr. Stixon replied; 'we all works our way up regular, the same as my lad is beginning for to do. New-fangled ways is not accepted here. We puts the reforming spirits scrubbing of the steps till their knuckles is cracked and their knees like a bean. The old lord was the man for discipline—your grandfather, if you please, Miss. He catched me when I were about that high——'

'Excuse me, Mr. Stixon, but would he have encouraged you to talk as you so very kindly talk to me, instead of answering a question?'

I thought that poor Stixon would have been upset by this, and was angry with myself for saying it. But instead of being hurt, he only smiled and touched his forehead.

'Well, now, you did remind me uncommon of him then, Miss. I could have heard the old lord speak almost, though he were always harsh and distant. And as I was going for to say, he catched me fifty years agone next Lammas tide; a pear tree of an early sort it was, you may see the very tree if you please to stand here, Miss, though the pears is quite altered now, and scarcely fit to eat. Well, I was running off, with my cap chockful, Miss——'

'Please to keep that story for another time,' I said; 'I shall be most happy to hear it then. But I have a particular wish, if you please, to see Mrs. Price before dark, unless there is any good reason why I should not.'

'Oh no, Miss Erema, no reason at all. Only please to bear in mind, Miss, that she is a coorous woman. She is that jealous, and I might say forward——'

'Then she is capable of speaking for herself.'

'You are right, Miss, there, and no mistake. She can speak for herself and for fifty others; words enough, I mean, for all of them. But I would not have her know for all the world that I said it.'

'Then if you do not send her to me at once, the first thing I shall do will be to tell her.'

'Oh, no, Miss, none of your family would do that; that never has been done anonymous.'

I assured him that my threat was not in earnest, but of pure impatience. And having no motive but downright jealousy for keeping Mrs. Price from me, he made up his mind at last to let her come. But he told me to be careful what I said; I must not expect it to be at all like talking to himself, for instance.

The housekeeper came up at last, by dint of my persistence, and she stopped in the doorway and made me a curtsey, which put me out of countenance, for nobody ever does that in America, and scarcely anyone in England now, except in country dancing. Instead of being as described by Stixon, Mrs. Price was of a very quiet, sensible, and respectful kind. She

was rather short, but looked rather tall, from her even walk and way of carrying her head. Her figure was neat, and her face clear-spoken, with straight pretty eyebrows, and calm bright eyes. I felt that I could tell her almost anything, and she would think before she talked of it. And in my strong want of some woman to advise with—Betsy Bowen being very good but very narrow, and Mrs. Hockin a mere echo of the Major until he contradicted her, and Suan Isco, with her fine, large views, five thousand miles out of sight just now—this was a state of things to enhance the value of any good countenance feminine.

At any rate, I was so glad to see her, that being still ungraduated in the steps of rank (though beginning to like a good footing there), I ran up and took her by both hands, and fetched her out of her grand curtsey and into a low chair. At this she was surprised, as one quick glance showed; and she thought me, perhaps, what is called in England 'an impulsive creature.' This put me again upon my dignity, for I never have been in any way like

that, and I clearly perceived that she ought to understand a little more distinctly my character.

It is easy to begin with this intention, but very hard indeed to keep it up when anybody of nice ways and looks is sitting with a proper deferential power of listening, and liking one's young ideas, which multiply and magnify themselves at each demand. So after some general talk about the weather, the country, the house, and so on, we came to the people of the house, or at any rate the chief person. And I asked her a few quiet questions about Lord Castlewood's health and habits, and anything else she might like to tell me. For many things had seemed to me a little strange and out of the usual course, and on that account worthy to be spoken of without common curiosity. Mrs. Price told me that there were many things generally divulged and credited, which therefore lay in her power to communicate without any derogation from her office. Being pleased with these larger words (which I always have trouble in pronouncing) I asked her whether there was anything else. And she answered yes, but un-

happily of a nature to which it was scarcely desirable to allude in my presence. I told her that this was not satisfactory, and I might say quite the opposite; that having 'alluded' to whatever it might be, she was bound to tell me all about it. That I had lived in very many countries, in all of which wrong things continually went on, of which I continually heard just in that sort of way and no more. Enough to make one uncomfortable, but not enough to keep one instructed and vigilant as to things that ought to be avoided. Upon this she yielded, either to my arguments or to her own dislike of unreasonable silence, and gave me the following account of the misfortunes of Lord Castlewood:—

Herbert William Castlewood was the third son of Dean Castlewood, a younger brother of my grandfather, and was born in the year 1806. He was older, therefore, than my father, but still (even before my father's birth, which provided a direct heir) there were many lives betwixt him and the family estates. And his father, having as yet no promotion in the

Church, found it hard to bring up his children. The eldest son got a commission in the army, and the second entered the navy, while Herbert was placed in a bank at Bristol, not at all the sort of life which he would have chosen. But being of a gentle, unselfish nature, as well as a weak constitution, he put up with his state in life, and did his best to give satisfaction.

This calm courage generally has its reward, and in the year 1842, not very long before the death of my grandfather at Shoxford, Mr. Herbert Castlewood, being well-connected, well-behaved, diligent, and pleasing, obtained a partnership in the firm, which was, perhaps, the foremost in the west of England. His two elder brothers happened then to be at home, Major and Commander Castlewood, each of whom had seen very hard service, and found it still harder slavery to make both ends meet, although bachelors. But, returning full of glory, they found one thing harder still, and that was to extract any cash from their father, the highly venerated Dean, who in that respect, if in no other, very closely resembled the head of the

family. Therefore these brave men resolved to go and see their Bristol brother, to whom they were tenderly attached, and who now must have money enough and to spare. So they wrote to their brother to meet them on the platform, scarcely believing that they could be there in so short a time from London; for they never had travelled by rail before, and they set forth in wonderful spirits, and laughed at the strange, giddy rush of the travelling, and made bets with each other about punctual time (for trains kept much better time while new), and, as long as they could time it, they kept time to a second. But, sad to relate, they wanted no chronometers when they arrived at Bristol, both being killed at a blow, with their watches still going, and a smile on their faces. For the train had run into a wall of Bath stone, and several of the passengers were killed.

The sight of his two brothers carried out like this, after so many years of not seeing them, was too much for Mr. Herbert Castlewood's nerves, which always had been delicate. And he shivered all the more from reproach of

conscience, having made up his mind not to lend them any money, as a practical banker was compelled to do. And from that very moment he began to feel great pain.

Mrs. Price assured me that the doctors all agreed that nothing but change of climate could restore Mr. Castlewood's tone and system, and being full of art (though so simple, as he said, which she could not entirely reconcile) he set off for Italy, and there he stopped, with the good leave of his partners, being now valued highly as heir to the Dean, who was known to have put a good trifle together. And in Italy my father must have found him, as related by Mr. Shovelin, and there received kindness and comfort in his trouble, if trouble so deep could be comforted.

Now I wondered and eagerly yearned to know whether my father, at such a time, and in such a state of loneliness, might not have been led to impart to his cousin, and host, and protector the dark mystery which lay at the bottom of his own conduct. Knowing how resolute and stern he was, and doubtless then

embittered by the wreck of love and life, I thought it more probable that he had kept silence even towards so near a relative, especially as he had seen very little of his cousin Herbert till he had found him thus. Moreover, my grandfather and the Dean had spent little brotherly love on each other, having had a life-long feud about a copyhold furze-brake of nearly three quarters of an acre, as Betsy remembered to have heard her master say.

To go on, however, with what Mrs. Price was saying. She knew scarcely anything about my father, because she was too young at that time to be called into the counsels of the servants' hall, for she scarcely was thirty-five yet, as she declared, and she certainly did not look forty. But all about the present Lord Castlewood she knew better than anybody else perhaps, because she had been in the service of his wife, and indeed her chief attendant. Then, having spoken of her master's wife, Mrs. Price caught herself up, and thenceforth called her only his 'lady.'

Mr. Herbert Castlewood, who had minded

his business for so many years, and kept himself aloof from ladies, spending all his leisure in good literature, at this time of life and in this state of health (for the shock he had received struck inwards), fell into an accident tenfold worse, the fatal accident of love. And this malady raged the more powerfully with him on account of breaking out so late in life. In one of the picture galleries at Florence, or some such place, Mrs. Price declared, he met with a lady who made all the pictures look cold, and dull, and dead to him. A lovely young creature she must have been (as even Mrs. Price, who detested her, acknowledged), and to the eyes of a learned but not keen man as good as lovely. My father was gone to look after me, and fetch me out of England; but even if he had been there, perhaps he scarcely could have stopped it; for this Mr. Castlewood, although so quiet, had the family fault of tenacity.

Mrs. Price, being a very steady person, with a limited income, and enough to do, was inclined to look down upon the state of mind in which Mr. Castlewood became involved. She was not

there at the moment, of course, but suddenly sent for when all was settled; nevertheless, she found out afterwards how it began from her master's man, through what he had for dinner. And in the kitchen-garden at Castlewood no rampion would she allow while she lived. I asked her whether she had no pity, no sympathy, no fine feeling, and how she could have become Mrs. Price if she never had known such sentiments. But she said that they only called her 'Mistress' on account of her authority, and she never had been drawn to the opposite sex, though many times asked in marriage. And what she had seen of matrimony led her far away from it. I was sorry to hear her say this, and felt damped, till I thought that the world was not all alike.

Then she told me, just as if it were no more than a bargain for a pound of tallow candles, how Mr. Herbert Castlewood, patient and persistent, was kept off and on for at least two years by the mother of his sweet idol. How the old lady held a balance in her mind as to the likelihood of his succession, trying, through

English friends, to find the value and the course of property. Of what nation she was Mrs. Price could not say, and only knew that it must be a bad one. She called herself the Countess of Ixorism, as truly pronounced in English; and she really was of good family too, so far as any foreigner can be. And her daughter's name was Flittamore, not according to the right spelling, perhaps, but pronounced with the proper accent.

Flittamore herself did not seem to care, according to what Mrs. Price had been told, but left herself wholly in her mother's hands, being sure of her beauty still growing upon her, and desiring to have it admired and praised. And the number of foreigners she always had about her sometimes made her real lover nearly give her up. But alas! he was not quite wise enough for this, with all that he had read, and learned, and seen. Therefore, when it was reported from Spain that my father had been killed by bandits—the truth being that he was then in Greece—the countess at last consented to the marriage of her daughter with Herbert

Castlewood, and even seemed to press it forward for some reasons of her own. And the happy couple set forth upon their travels, and Mrs. Price was sent abroad to wait upon the lady.

For a few months they seemed to get on very well, Flittamore showing much affection for her husband, whose age was a trifle more than her own doubled, while he was entirely wrapped up in her, and laboured that the graces of her mind might be worthy to compare with those more visible. But her spiritual face and most sweet poetic eyes were vivid with bodily brilliance alone. She had neither mind enough to learn nor heart enough to pretend to learn.

It is out of my power to describe such things, even if it were my duty to do so, which, happily, it has never been; moreover, Mrs. Price, in what she told me, exercised a just and strict reserve. Enough that Mr. Castlewood's wedded life was done within six months and three days. Lady Castlewood—as she would be called, though my father still was living and his cousin disclaimed the title—away she ran from some

dull German place, after a very stiff lesson in poetry, and with her ran off a young Englishman, the present Sir Montague Hockin. He was Mr. Hockin then, and had not a halfpenny of his own; but Flittamore met that difficulty by robbing her husband to his last farthing.

This had happened about twelve years back, soon after I was placed at the school in Languedoc, to which I was taken so early in life that I almost forget all about it. But it might have been better for poor Flittamore if she had been brought up at a steady place like that, with sisters and ladies of retreat, to teach her the proper description of her duties to mankind. I seemed now in my own mind to condemn her quite enough, feeling how superior her husband must have been; but Mrs. Price went even further, and became quite indignant that anyone should pity her.

'A hussy, a hussy, a poppet of a hussy!' she exclaimed, with greater power than her quiet face could indicate; 'never would I look at her. Speak never so, Miss Castlewood. My lord is the very best of all men, and she has

made him what he is. The pity she deserves is to be trodden underfoot, as I saw them do in Naples.'

After all the passion I had seen among rough people, I scarcely could help trembling at the depth of wrath dissembled, and firmly controlled, in calm clear eyes under very steadfast eyebrows. It was plain that Lord Castlewood had, at any rate, the gift of being loved by his dependents.

'I hope that he took it aright!' I cried, catching some of her indignation; 'I hope that he cast her to the winds, without even a sigh for such a cruel creature!'

'He was not strong enough,' she answered sadly; 'his bodily health was not equal to it. From childhood he had been partly crippled and spoiled in his nerves by an accident. And the shock of that sight at Bristol flew to his weakness, and was too much for him. And now this third and worst disaster, coming upon him where his best hope lay, and at such a time of life, took him altogether off his legs. And off his head too, I might almost say, Miss; for,

instead of blaming her, he put the fault entirely upon himself. At his time of life, and in such poor health, he should not have married a bright young girl; how could he ever hope to make her happy? That was how he looked at it, when he should have sent constables after her.'

'And what became of her—the mindless animal, to forsake so good and great a man? I do hope she was punished, and that vile man too.'

'She was, Miss Castlewood; but he was not; at least, he has not received justice yet. But he will, he will, he will, Miss. The treacherous thief! And my lord received him as a young fellow-countryman under a cloud, and lent him money, and saved him from starving; for he had broken with his father, and was running rom his creditors.'

'Tell me no more,' I said; 'not another word. It is my fate to meet that—well, that gentleman, almost every day. And he, and he—oh, how thankful I am to have found out all his about him!'

The above will show why, when I met my father's cousin on the following morning—with his grand, calm face, as benevolent as if he had passed a night of luxurious rest, instead of sleepless agony—I knew myself to be of a lower order, in mind, and soul, and heart, than his—a small, narrow, passionate girl, in the presence of a large, broad-sighted, and compassionate man.

I threw myself altogether on his will; for, when I trust, I trust wholly. And, under his advice, I did not return with any rash haste to Bruntsea, but wrote in discharge of all duty there; while Mrs. Price, a clear and steadfast woman, was sent to London to see Wilhelmina Strouss. These two must have had warm talks together, and, both being zealous and faithful, arrived at many misunderstandings. However, on the whole, they became fine friends, and almost sworn allies at last, discovering more, the more they talked, people towards whom they nursed a common and just enmity.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SHOXFORD.

Are there people who have never, in the course of anxious life, felt desire to be away, to fly away from everything, however good and dear to them, and rest a little, and think new thought, or let new thought flow into them, from the gentle air of some new place, where nobody has heard of them? A place whose cares, being felt by proxy, almost seem romantic, and where the eyes spare brain and heart, with a critic's self-complacence. If any such place yet remains, the happy soul may seek it in an inland English village.

A village where no billows are, to stun or to confound it; no crag or precipice to trouble it with giddiness; and where no hurry of restless tide makes time, its own father, uneasy. But in the quiet, at the bottom of the valley, a

beautiful rivulet, belonging to the place, hastens or lingers, according to its mood; hankering here and there, not to be away yet; and then, by the doing of its own work, led to a swift perplexity of ripples. Here along its side, and there softly leaning over it, fresh green meadows lie reposing in the settled meaning of the summer day. For this is a safer time of year than the flourish of the spring-tide, when the impulse of young warmth awaking was suddenly smitten by the bleak east wind; and cowslip, and cuckoo-flower, and speedwell got their bright lips browned with cold. Then, moreover, must the meads have felt the worry of scarcely knowing yet what would be demanded of them; whether to carry an exacting load of hay, or only to feed a few sauntering cows.

But now every trouble has been settled for the best; the long grass is mown, and the short grass browsed; and capers of the fairies and caprices of the cows have dappled worn texture with a deeper green. Therefore, let eyes that are satisfied here—as any but a very bad eye must be, with so many changes of softness—

follow the sweet lead of the valley; and there, in a bend of the gently brawling river, stands the never brawling church.

A church less troubled with the gift of tongues is not to be found in England. A church of grey stone, that crumbles just enough to entice frail mortal sympathy, and confesses to the storms it has undergone in a tone that conciliates the human sigh. The town is large, and high enough to tell what the way of the wind is, without any potato-bury on the top; and the simple roof is not cruciated with tiles of misguided fancy. But grey rest, and peace of ages, and content of lying calmly six feet deeper than the bustle of the quick; memory also, and oblivion, following each other slowly, like the shadows of the churchyard trees—for all of these no better place can be, no softer comfort.

For the village of Shoxford runs up on the rise, and straggles away from its burial-place, as a child from his school goes mitching. There are some few little ups and downs in the manner of its building, as well as in other par-

ticulars about it; but still it keeps as parallel with the crooked river as the far more crooked ways of men permit. But the whole of the little road of houses runs down the valley from the churchyard gate; and above the church, looking up the pretty valley, stands nothing but the mill and the plank bridge below it; and a furlong above that again the stone bridge, where the main road crosses the stream, and is consoled by leading to a big house—the Moonstock Inn.

The house in which my father lived so long—or rather I should say, my mother, while he was away with his regiment—and where we unfortunate seven saw the light, stands about halfway down the little village, being on the right-hand side of the road, as you come down the valley from the Moonstock bridge. Therefore it is on the further and upper side of the street—if it can be called a street—from the valley, and the river, and the meads below the mill; inasmuch as every bit of Shoxford, and every particle of the parish also, has existence—of no mean sort, as compared with other parishes, in

its own esteem—on the right side of the river Moon.

My father's house, in this good village, standing endwise to the street, was higher at one end than at the other. That is to say, the ground came sloping, or even falling, as fairly might be said, from one end to the other of it, so that it looked like a Noah's ark, tilted by Behemoth under the stern-post. And a little lane, from a finely wooded hill, here fell steeply into the 'High Street' (as the grocer and the butcher loved to call it), and made my father's house most distinct, by obeying a good deal of its outline, and discharging in heavy rain a free supply of water under the weather-board of our front door. This front door opened on the little steep triangle formed by the meeting of lane and road, while the back door led into a long but narrow garden running along the road, but raised some feet above it; the bank was kept up by a rough stone wall, crested with stuck-up snap-dragon and valerian, and faced with rosettes, and disks, and dills of house-leek, pennywort, and hartstongue.

Betsy and I were only just in time to see the old house as it used to be; for the owner had died about half a year ago, and his grandson, having proved his will, was resolved to make short work with it. The poor house was blamed for the sorrows it had sheltered, and had the repute of two spectres, as well as the pale shadow of misfortune. For my dear father was now believed, by the superstitious villagers, to haunt the old home of his happiness and love, and roam from room to room in search of his wife and all his children. But his phantom was most careful not to face that of his father, which stalked along haughtily, as behoved a lord, and pointed for ever to a red wound in its breast. No wonder, therefore, that the house would never let; and it would have been pulled down long ago if the owner had not felt a liking for it, through memories tender and peculiar to himself. His grandson, having none of these to contend with, resolved to make a mere stable of it, and build a public-house at the bottom of the garden, and turn the space between them into skittle-ground, and so forth.

To me this seemed such a very low idea, and such a desecration of a sacred spot, that, if I had owned any money to be sure of, I would have offered hundreds to prevent it. But I found myself now in a delicate state of mind concerning money; having little of my own, and doubting how much other people might intend for me. So that I durst not offer to buy land and a house without any means to pay.

And it was not for that reason only that Betsy and I kept ourselves quiet. We knew that any stir in this little place about us—such as my name might at once set going—would once for all destroy all hope of doing good by coming. Betsy knew more of such matters than I did, besides all her knowledge of the place itself, and her great superiority of age; therefore I left to her all little management, as was in every way fair and wise. For Mrs. Strouss had forsaken a large and good company of lodgers, with only Herr Strouss to look after them—and who was he among them? If she trod on one side of her foot, or felt a tingling in her hand, or a buzzing in her ear, she

knew in a moment what it was—of pounds and pounds was she being cheated, a hundred miles off, by foreigners!

For this reason it had cost much persuasion, and many appeals to her faithfulness, as well as considerable weekly payment, ere ever my good nurse could be brought away from London; and perhaps even so she never would have come, if I had not written myself to Mrs. Price, then visiting Betsy in European Square, that if the landlady was too busy to be spared by her lodgers, I must try to get Lord Castlewood to spare me his housekeeper. Upon this Mrs. Strouss at once declared that Mrs. Price would ruin everything; and rather than that—no matter what she lost—she herself would go with me. And so she did, and she managed very well, keeping my name out of sight—for, happen what might, I would have no false one—and she got quiet lodgings in her present name, which sounded nicely foreign; and the village being more agitated now about my father's material house, and the work they were promised in pulling it down, than about his

shattered household, we had a very favourable time for coming in, and were pronounced to be foreigners who must not be allowed to run up bills.

This rustic conclusion suited us quite well; and we soon confirmed it unwittingly, Betsy offering a German thaler and I an American dollar at the shop of the village chandler and baker, so that we were looked upon with some pity, and yet a kind desire for our custom. Thus, without any attempt of ours at either delusion or mystery, Mrs. Strouss was hailed throughout the place as 'Madam Straw;' while I, through the sagacity of a deeply-read shoemaker, obtained a foreign name, as will by-and-by appear.

We lodged at the post-office; not through any wisdom or even any thought on our part, but simply because we happened there to find the cleanest and prettiest rooms in the place. For the sun being now in the height of August, and having much harvest to ripen, at middle day came ramping down the little street of Shoxford, like the chairman of the guild of bakers.

Every house having lately brightened up its whitewash—which they always do there when the frosts are over, soon after the feast of Saint Barnabas—and the weeds of the way having fared amiss in the absence of any watercart, it was not in the strong, sharp character of the sun to miss such an opportunity. After the red Californian glare, I had no fear of any English sun ; but Betsy was frightened, and both of us were glad to get into a little place sheltered by green blinds. This chanced to be the post-office ; and there we found nice lodgings.

By an equal chance this proved to be the wisest thing we could possibly have done, if we had set about it carefully. For why, that nobody ever would impute any desire of secrecy to people who straightway unpacked their boxes at the very head-quarters of all the village news. And the mistress of the post was a sharp-tongued woman, pleased to speak freely of her neighbours' doings, and prompt with good advice that they should heed their own business, if any of them durst say a word about her own. She kept a tidy little shop, showing something of

almost everything; but we had a side door, quite of our own, where Betsy met the baker's wife and the veritable milkman; and neither of them knew her, which was just what she had hoped; and yet it made her speak amiss of them.

But if all things must be brought to the harsh test of dry reason, I myself might be hard pushed to say what good I hoped to do by coming thus to Shoxford. I knew of a great many things, for certain, that never had been thoroughly examined here; also I naturally wished to see, being a native, what the natives were; and much more than that, it was always on my mind that here lay my mother, and the other six of us.

Therefore it was an impatient thing for me to hear Betsy working out the afternoon with perpetual chatter and challenge of prices, combating now as a lodger all those points which as a landlady she never would allow even to be moot questions. If any applicant in European Square had dared so much as hint at any of all the requirements which she now expected gratis, she would simply have whisked her duster, and

said that the lodgings for such people must be looked for down the alley. However, Mrs. Busk, our new landlady, although she had a temper of her own (as anyone keeping a post-office must have), was forced by the rarity of lodgers here to yield many points, which Mrs. Strouss, on her own boards, would not even have allowed to be debated. All this was entirely against my wish; for when I have money I spend it, finding really no other good in it; but Betsy told me that the purest principle of all was—not to be cheated.

So I left her to have these little matters out, and took that occasion for stealing away (as the hours grew on towards evening) to a place where I wished to be quite alone. And the shadow of the western hills shed peace upon the valley when I crossed a little stile leading into Shoxford churchyard.

For a minute or two I was quite afraid, seeing nobody anywhere about, nor even hearing any sound in the distance to keep me company. For the church lay apart from the village, and was thickly planted out from it,

the living folk being full of superstition, and deeply believing in the dead people's ghosts. And even if this were a wife to a husband, or even a husband reappearing to his wife, there was not a man or a woman in the village that would not run away from it.

This I did not know at present, not having been there long enough; neither had I any terror of that sort, not being quite such a coward, I should hope. But still, as the mantles of the cold trees darkened, and the stony remembrance of the dead grew pale, and of the living there was not even the whistle of a gravedigger—my heart got the better of my mind for a moment, and made me long to be across that stile again. Because (as I said to myself) if there had been a hill to go up, that would be so different, and so easy; but going down into a place like this, whence the only escape must be by steps, and where any flight must be along channels, that run in and out of graves and tombstones, I tried not to be afraid, yet could not altogether help it.

But lo, when I came to the north side of the tower, scarcely thinking what to look for,

I found myself in the middle of a place which made me stop and wonder. Here were six little grassy tuffets, according to the length of children, all laid east and west, without any stint of room, harmoniously.

From the eldest to the youngest, one could almost tell the age at which their lowly stature stopped, and took its final measurement.

And in the middle was a larger grave to comfort and encourage them, as a hen lies down among her chicks, and waits for them to shelter. Without a name to any of them, all these seven graves lay together, as in a fairy ring of rest, and kind compassion had prevented any stranger from coming to be buried there.

I would not sit on my mother's grave for fear of crushing the pretty grass, which some one tended carefully; but I stood at its foot, and bent my head, and counted all the little ones. Then I thought of my father in the grove of peaches, more than six thousand miles away, on the banks of the soft Blue River And a sense of desolate sorrow and of the blessing of death overwhelmed me.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE SEXTON.

With such things in my mind, it took me long to come back to my work again. It even seemed a wicked thing, so near to all these proofs of God's great visitation over us, to walk about and say, 'I will do this;' or even to think, 'I will try to do that.' My own poor helplessness, and loss of living love to guide me, laid upon my heart a weight from which it scarcely cared to move. All was buried, all was done with, all had passed from out the world, and left no mark but graves behind. What good to stir anew such sadness, even if a poor weak thing like me could move its mystery.

Time, however, and my nurse Betsy, and Jacob Rigg the gardener, brought me back to a better state of mind, and renewed the right

courage within me. But, first of all, Jacob Rigg aroused my terror and interest vividly. It may be remembered that this good man had been my father's gardener at the time of our great calamity, and almost alone of the Shoxford people had shown himself true and faithful. Not that the natives had turned against us, or been at all unfriendly; so far from this was the case, that every one felt for our troubles, and pitied us, my father being of a cheerful and affable turn, until misery hardened him; but what I mean is, that only one or two had the courage to go against the popular conclusion, and the convictions of authority.

But Jacob was a very upright man, and had a strong liking for his master, who many and many a time—as he told me—had taken a spade and dug along with him, just as if he were a jobbing gardener born, instead of a fine young nobleman; 'and nobody gifted with that turn of mind, likewise very clever in white-spine cowcumbers, could ever be relied upon to go and shoot his father.' Thus reasoned old Jacob, and he always had done so,

and meant evermore to abide by it; and the graves which he had tended now for nigh a score of years, and meant to tend till he called for his own, were—as sure as he stood there in Shoxford churchyard a talking to me, who was the very image of my father, God bless me, though not of course so big-like—the graves of slaughtered innocents, and the mother who was always an angel. And the parson might preach for ever to him about the resurrection, and the right coming uppermost when you got to heaven, but to his mind that was scarcely any count at all; and if you came to that, we ought to hang Jack Ketch, as might come to pass in the Revelations. But while a man had got his own bread to earn, till his honour would let him go to the workhouse, and his duty to the ratepayers, there was nothing that vexed him more than to be told any texts of Holy Scripture. Whatever God Almighty had put down there was meant for ancient people, the Jews being long the most ancient people, though none the more for that did he like them; and so it was mainly the ancient folk,

who could not do a day's work worth eighteenpence, that could enter into Bible promises. Not that he was at all behindhand about interpretation; but as long as he could fetch and earn, at planting box and doing borders, two shillings and ninepence a day and his beer, he was not going to be on for kingdom-come.

I told him that I scarcely thought his view of our condition here would be approved by wise men who had found time to study the subject. But he answered that whatever their words might be, their doings showed that they knew what was the first thing to attend to. And if it ever happened him to come across a parson who was as full of heaven outside as he was inside his surplice, he would keep his garden in order for nothing better than his blessing.

I knew of no answer to be made to this. And indeed he seemed to be aware that his conversation was too deep for me; so he leaned upon his spade, and rubbed his long blue chin in the shadow of the church-tower, holding as he did the position of sexton, and preparing even now to dig a grave.

'I keeps them well away from you,' he said, as he began to chop out a new oblong in the turf; 'many a shilling have I been offered by mothers about their little ones, to put 'em inside of the "holy ring," as we calls this little cluster; but not for five golden guineas would I do it, and have to face the Captain, dead or alive, about it. We heard that he was dead, because it was put in all the papers; and a pleasant place I keeps for him, to come home alongside of his family. A nicer gravelly bit of ground there couldn't be in all the county; and if no chance of him occupying it, I can drive down a peg with your mark Miss.'

'Thank you,' I answered; 'you are certainly most kind; but Mr. Rigg, I would rather wait a little. I have had a very troublesome life thus far, and nothing to bind me to it much; but still, I would rather not have my peg driven down just—just at present.'

'Ah! you be like all the young folk that think the tree for their coffins ain't come to the size of this spade-handle yet. Lord bless you for not knowing what He hath in hand! Now this one you see me a raising of the turf for

stood as upright as you do, a fortnight back, and as good about the chest and shoulders, and three times the colour in her cheeks, and her eyes a'most as bright as yourn be. Not aristocratic, you must understand me, Miss, being only the miller's daughter, nor instructed to throw her voice the same as you do, which is better than gallery music; but setting these haxidents to one side, a farmer would have said she was more preferable, because more come-at-able, though not in my opinion to be compared—excuse me for making so free, Miss, but when it comes to death we has a kind of right to do it—and many a young farmer, coming to the mill, was disturbed in his heart about her, and far and wide she was known, being proud, as the Beauty of the Moonshine, from the name of our little river. She used to call me 'Jacob Diggs,' because of my porochial office, with a meaning of a joke on my parenshal name. Ah, what a merry one she were! And now this is what I has to do for her! And sooner would I 'a doed it a'most for my own old ooman!'

'O, Jacob!' I cried, being horrified at the

way in which he tore up the ground, as if his wife were waiting; 'the things you say are quite wrong, I am sure, for a man in your position. You are connected with the church almost as much as the clerk is.'

'More, Miss, ten times more! He don't do nothing but lounge on the front of his desk, and be too lazy to keep up 'Amen,' while I at my time of life go about, from Absolution to the fifth Lord's prayer, with a stick that makes my rheumatics worse, for the sake of the boys with their pockets full of nuts. When I was a boy there was no nuts, except at the proper time of year, a month or two on from this time of speaking; and we used to crack they in the husk, and make no noise to disturb the congregation; but now it is nuts, nuts, round nuts, flat nuts, nuts with three corners to them—all the year round nuts to crack and me to find out who did it!'

'But, Mr. Rigg,' I replied, as he stopped, looking hotter in mind than in body; 'is it not Mrs. Rigg, your good wife, who sells all the nuts on a Saturday, for the boys to crack on a Sunday.'

'My Missus do sell some, to be sure; yes, just a few. But not of a Saturday more than any other day.'

'Then surely, Mr. Rigg, you might stop it, by not permitting any sale of nuts except to good boys of high principles. And has it not happened sometimes, Mr. Rigg, that boys have made marks on their nuts, and bought them again at your shop on a Monday? I mean of course when your duty has compelled you to empty the pockets of a boy in church.'

Now this was a particle of shamefully small gossip, picked up naturally by my Betsy, but pledged to go no further; and as soon as I had spoken I became a little nervous, having it suddenly brought to my mind that I had promised not even to whisper it; and now I had told it to the man of all men! But Jacob appeared to have been quite deaf, and diligently went on digging. And I said 'good evening,' for the grave was for the morrow; and he let me go nearly to the stile, before he stuck his spade into the ground, and followed.

'Excoose of my making use,' he said, 'of a

kind of a personal reference, Miss; but you be that pat with your answers, it maketh me believe you must be sharp inside; more than your father, the poor Captain, were, as all them little grass buttons argueth. Now, Miss, if I thought you had headpiece enough to keep good counsel and ensue it, may be I could tell you a thing as would make your hair creep out of them coorous hitch-ups, and your heart a'most bust them there braids of fallallies.'

'Why, what in the world do you mean?' I asked, being startled by the old man's voice and face.

'Nothing, Miss, nothing. I was only a joking. If you bain't come to no more discretion than that—to turn as white as the clerk's smockfrock of a Easter Sunday—why, the more of a joke one has the better, to bring your purty colour back to you. Ah! Polly of the mill was the maid for colour; as good for the eyesight as a chaney rose in April. Well, well, I must get on with her grave; they're a coming to speak the good word over 'un, on sundown.'

He might have known how this would vex and perplex me. I could not bear to hinder him in his work—as important as any to be done by man for man—and yet it was beyond my power to go home and leave him there, and wonder what it was that he had been so afraid to tell. So I quietly said, 'Then I will wish you a very good evening again, Mr. Rigg, as you are too busy to be spoken with.' And I walked off a little way, having met with men who, having begun a thing, needs must have it out, and fully expecting him to call me back. But Jacob only touched his hat, and said, 'A pleasant evening to you, Ma'am.'

Nothing could have made me feel more resolute than this did. I did not hesitate one moment in running back over the stile again, and demanding of Jacob Rigg that he should tell me whether he meant anything or nothing; for I was not to be played with, about important matters, like the boys in the church who were cracking nuts.

'Lord! Lord now!' he said, with his treddled heel scraping the shoulder of his shining

spade; 'the longer I live in this world, the fitter I grow to get into the ways of the Lord. His ways are past finding out, saith King David; but a man of war, from his youth upward, hath no chance such as a gardening man hath. What a many of them have I found out!'

'What has that got to do with it?' I cried. 'Just tell me what it was you were speaking of just now.'

'I was just a thinking when I looked at you, Miss,' he answered in the prime of leisure, and wiping his forehead from habit only, not because he wanted it, 'how little us knows of the times, and seasons, and the generations of the sons of men. There you stand, Miss; and here stand I, as haven't seen your father for a score of years a'most; and yet there comes out of your eyes into mine the very same look as the Captain used to send, when snakes in the grass had been telling lies about me coming late, or having my half-pint, or so on. Not that the Captain was a hard man, Miss—far otherwise, and capable of allowance, more than any of the women be. But only the Lord, who doeth all things aright,

could 'a made you come, with a score of years atween, and the twinkle in your eyes, like Selah!'

'You know what you mean, perhaps, but I do not,' I answered quite gently, being troubled by his words, and the fear of having tried to hurry him; 'but you should not say what you have said, Jacob Rigg, to me, your master's daughter, if you only meant to be joking. Is this the place to joke with me?'

I pointed to all that lay around me, where I could not plant a foot without stepping over my brothers or sisters; and the old man, callous as he might be, could not help feeling for—a pinch of snuff. This he found in the right-hand pocket of his waistcoat, and took it very carefully, and made a little noise of comfort; and thus, being fully self-assured again, he stood with his feet far apart, and his head on one side, regarding me warily. And I took good care not to say another word.

'You be young,' he said at last; 'and in these latter days no wisdom is ordained in the mouths of babes and sucklings, nor always in

the mouths of them as is themselves ordained. But you have a way of keeping your chin up, Miss, as if you was gifted with a stiff tongue likewise. And whatever may hap, I has as good mind to tell 'e.'

'That you are absolutely bound to do,' I answered as forcibly as I could. 'Duty to your former master, and to me, his only child, and to yourself, and your Maker too, compel you, Jacob Rigg, to tell me everything you know.'

'Then, Miss,' he answered, coming nearer to me, and speaking in a low, hoarse voice, 'as sure as I stand here in God's churchyard, by all this murdered family, I knows the man who done it.'

He looked at me, with a trembling finger upon his hard-set lips, and the spade in his other hand quivered like a wind-vane; but I became as firm as the monument beside me, and my heart, instead of fluttering, grew as steadfast as a glacier. Then for the first time I knew that God had not kept me living, when all the others died, without fitting me also for the work there was to do.

'Come here to the corner of the tower, Miss,' old Jacob went on, in his excitement catching hold of the sleeve of my black silk jacket; 'where we stand is a queer sort of echo, which goeth in and out of them big tombstones. And for aught I can say to contrairy, he may be a watching of us while here we stand.'

I glanced around, as if he were most welcome to be watching me, if only I could see him once. But the place was as silent as its graves; and I followed the sexton to the shadow of a buttress. Here he went into a deep-grey corner, lichened and mossed by a drip from the roof; and being, both in his clothes and self, pretty much of that same colour, he was not very easy to discern from stone when the light of day was declining.

'This is where I catches all the boys,' he whispered; 'and this is where I caught him, one evening when I were tired, and gone to nurse my knees a bit. Let me see; why, let me see! Don't you speak till I do, Miss. Were it the last but one I dug? Or could 'un 'a been the

last but two? Never mind; I can't call to mind quite justly. We puts down about one a month in this parish, without any distemper or haxident. Well, it must 'a been the one afore last—to be sure, no call to scratch my head about 'un! Old Sally Mock, as sure as I stand here—done handsome by the ratepayers! Over there, Miss, if you please to look—about two land-yards and a half away. Can you see 'un with the grass peeking up, a'ready?'

'Never mind that, Jacob; do please to go on.'

'So I be, Miss. So I be doing to the best of the power granted me. Well, I were in this little knuckle of a squat, where old Sally used to say as I went to sleep, and charged the parish for it—a spiteful old 'ooman, and I done her grave with pleasure, only wishing her had to pay for it; and to prove to her mind that I never goed asleep here; I was just making ready to set fire to my pipe, having cocked my shovel in to ease my legs, like this, when from round yon corner of the chancel-foot, and over again that there old tree, I seed a something movin' along —movin' along, without any noise or declarance

of solid feet walking. You may see the track burnt in the sod, if you let your eyes go along this here finger.'

'Oh, Jacob, how could you have waited to see it?'

'I did, Miss, I did; being used to a many antics in this dead-yard, such as a man who hadn't buried them might up foot to run away from. But they no right, after the service of the Church, to come up for more than one change of the moon, unless they have been great malefactors. And then they be ashamed of it; and I reminds them of it. "Amen," I say, in the very same voice as I used at the tail of their funerals; and then they knows well that I covered them up, and the most uneasy goes back again. Lor' bless you, Miss; I no fear of the dead. At both ends of life us be harmless; it is in the life, and mostways in the middle of it, we makes all the death for one another.'

This was true enough; and I only nodded to him, fearing to interject any new ideas from which he might go rambling.'

'Well, that there figure were no joke, mind

you,' the old man continued, as soon as he had freshened his narrative powers with another pinch of snuff; 'being tall, and grim, and white in the face, and very onpleasant for to look at; and its eyes seemed a'most to burn holes in the air. No sooner did I see that it were not a ghostie, but a living man the same as I be, than my knees begins to shake and my stumps of teeth to chatter. And what do you think it was stopped me, Miss, from slipping round this corner, and away by belfry? Nort but the hoddest idea you ever heared on. For all of a suddint it was borne unto my mind that the Lord had been pleased to send us back the Captain; not so handsome as he used to be, but in the living flesh, however, in spite of they newspapers. And I were just at the pint of coming forrard, out of this here dark cornder, knowing as I had done my duty by them graves that his honour to my mind must 'a come looking after, when, lucky for me, I see summat in his walk, and then in his countenance, and then in all his features, unnateral on the Captain's part, whatever his time of life might be. And

sure enough, Miss, it were no Captain, more nor I myself be.'

'Of course not. How could it be? But who was it, Jacob?'

'You bide a bit, Miss, and you shall hear the whole. Well, by that time 'twas too late for me to slip away, and I was bound to scrooge up into the elbow of this nick here, and try not to breathe as nigh as might be, and keep my Lammas cough down; for I never see a face more full of malice and uncharity. However, he come on, as straight as a arrow, holding his long chin out, like this, as if he had gotten crutches under it, as the folk does with bad water. A tall man, as tall as the Captain a'most, but not gifted with any kind aspect. He tramped över the general graves, like the devil come to fetch their souls out; but when he come here to the "holy ring," he stopped short, and stood with his back to me. I could hear him count the seven graves, as pat as the shells of oysters to pay for, and then he said all their names, as true, from the biggest to the leastest one, as Betsy Bowen could 'a done it; though none

of 'em got no mark to 'em. Oh, the poor little hearts, it was cruel hard upon them? And then my lady in the middle, making seven. So far as I could catch over his shoulder, he seemed to be quite a talking with her, not as you and I be, Miss; but a sort of a manner of a way, like.'

'And what did he seem to say? Oh, Jacob, how long you do take over it!'

'Well, he did not, Miss; that you may say for sartain. And glad I was to have him quick about it; for he might have redooced me to such a condition—ay and I believe 'a would too if onst 'a had caught sight of me—as the parish might 'a had to fight over the appintment of another sexton. And so at last 'a went away. And I were that stiff with scrooging in this cornder——'

'Is that all? Oh that comes to nothing! Surely you must have more to tell me? It may have been some one who knew our names. It may have been some old friend of the family.'

'No, Miss, no! No familiar friend; or if he was, he were like King David's. He bore a

tyrannous hate against 'e, and the poison of asps were under his lips. In this here hattitude he stood, with his back toward me, and his reins more upright than I be capable of putting it. And this was how he held up his elbow and his head. Look 'e see, Miss, and then 'e know as much as I do.'

Mr. Rigg marched with a long smooth step —a most difficult strain for his short-bowed legs —as far as the place he had been pointing out; and there he stood with his back to me, painfully doing what the tall man had done, so far as the difference of size allowed.

It was not possible for me to laugh in a matter of such sadness; and yet Jacob stood, with his back to me, spreading and stretching himself in such a way, to be up to the dimensions of the stranger, that—low as it was—I was compelled to cough, for fear of fatally offending him.

'That warn't quite right, Miss. Now you look again!' he exclaimed, with a little readjustment. 'Only he had a thing over one shoulder, the like of what the Scotchmen wear; and his

features was beyond me, because of the back of his head, like. For God's sake keep out of his way, Miss.'

The sexton stood in a musing, and yet a stern and defiant attitude, with the right elbow clasped in the left-hand palm, the right hand resting half-clenched upon the forehead, and the shoulders thrown back, as if ready for a blow.

'What a very odd way to stand!' I said.

'Yes, Miss. And what he said was odder. "Six, and the mother!" I heard 'un say; "no cure for it till I have all seven." But stop, Miss. Not a breath to anyone! Here comes the poor father and mother to speak the blessing across their daughter's grave—and the grave not two foot down yet!'

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A SIMPLE QUESTION.

Now this account of what Jacob Rigg had seen, and heard, threw me into a state of mind extremely unsatisfactory. To be in eager search of some unknown person who had injured me inexpressibly, without any longing for revenge on my part, but simply with a view to justice —this was a very different thing from feeling that an unknown person was in quest of me, with the horrible purpose of destroying me, to ensure his own wicked safety.

At first, I almost thought that he was welcome to do this; that such a life as mine (if looked at from an outer point of view) was better to be died than lived out. Also that there was nobody left, to get any good out of all that I could do; and even if I ever should succeed, truth would come out of her tomb too

late. And this began to make me cry, which I had long given over doing, with no one to feel for the heart of it.

But a thing of this kind could not long endure; and as soon as the sun of the morrow arose (or at least as soon as I was fit to see him), my view of the world was quite different. Here was the merry brook, playing with the morning, spread around with ample depth and rich retreat of meadows; and often, after maze of leisure, hastening with a tinkle into shadowy delight of trees. Here, as well, were happy lanes, and footpaths of a soft content, unworn with any pressure of the price of time or business. None of them knew (in spite, at flurried spots, of their own direction-posts) whence they were coming, or whither going—only that here they lay, between the fields, or through them, like idle veins of earth, with sometimes company of a man or boy, whistling to his footfall, or a singing maid with a milking-pail. And how ungrateful it would be to forget the pleasant copses, in waves of deep green leafage flowing down and up the channelled hills, waving at the

wind to tints and tones of new refreshment, and tempting idle folk to come and hear the hush, and see the twinkled texture of pellucid gloom!

Much, however, as I loved to sit in places of this kind alone, for some little time I feared to do so, after hearing the sexton's tale; for Jacob's terror was so unfeigned (though his own life had not been threatened), that knowing as I did from Betsy's account, as well as his own appearance, that he was not at all a nervous man, I could not help sharing his vague alarm. It seemed so terrible that anyone should come to the graves of my sweet mother and her six harmless children, and, instead of showing pity, as even a monster might have tried to do, should stand—if not with threatening gestures, yet with a most hostile mien—and thirst for the life of the only survivor—my poor self.

But terrible or not, the truth was so; and neither Betsy nor myself could shake Mr. Rigg's conclusion. Indeed he became more and more emphatic, in reply to our doubts and mild suggestions, perhaps that his eyes had deceived him, or perhaps that, taking a nap in

the corner of the buttress, he had dreamed at least a part of it. And Betsy, on the score of ancient friendship, and kind remembrance of his likings, put it to him in a gentle way, whether his knowledge of what Sally Mock had been, and the calumnies she might have spoken of his beer (when herself, in the workhouse, deprived of it), might not have induced him to take a little more than usual, in going down so deep for her. But he answered, 'No; it was nothing of the sort. Deep he had gone, to the tiptoe of his fling; not from any feeling of a wish to keep her down, but just because the parish paid, and the parish would have measurement. And when that was on, he never brought down more than the quart tin from the public; and never had none down afterwards. Otherwise the ground was so ticklish, that a man, working too free, might stay down there. No, no! That idea was like one of Sally's own. He just had his quart of Persfield ale—short measure of course, with a woman at the bar—and if that were enough to make a man dream dreams, the sooner he dug his own grave, the better for all connected with him.'

We saw that we had gone too far in thinking of such a possibility; and if Mr. Rigg had not been large-minded, as well as notoriously sober, Betsy might have lost me all the benefit of his evidence by her London-bred clumsiness with him. For it takes quite a different handling, and a different mode of outset, to get on with the London working-class, and the labouring kind of the country; or at least it seemed to me so.

Now my knowledge of Jacob Rigg was owing, as might be supposed, to Betsy Strouss, who had taken the lead of me in almost everything ever since I brought her down from London. And now I was glad that, in one point at least, her judgment had overruled mine—to wit, that my name and parentage were as yet not generally known in the village. Indeed, only Betsy herself, and Jacob, and a faithful old washerwoman, with no roof to her mouth, were aware of me as Miss Castlewood. Not that I had taken any other name—to that I would not stoop—but because the public, of its own accord, paying attention to Betsy's style of addressing me, followed her lead (with

some little improvement), and was pleased to entitle me 'Miss Raumur.'

Some question had been raised as to spelling me aright; till a man of advanced intelligence proved to many eyes, and even several pairs of spectacles (assembled in front of the blacksmith's shop), that no other way could be right except that. For there it was in print, as anyone able might see on the side of an instrument, whose name and qualities were even more mysterious than those in debate. Therefore I became 'Miss Raumur;' and a protest would have gone for nothing unless printed also. But it did not behove me to go to that expense, while it suited me very well to be considered and pitied as a harmless foreigner—a being, who on English land may find some cause to doubt whether, even in his own country, a prophet could be less thought of. And this large pity for me, as an outlandish person, in the very spot where I was born, endowed me with tenfold the privilege of the proudest native. For the natives of this valley are declared to be of a different stock from those

around them, not of the common Wessex strain, but of Jutish or Danish origin. How that may be I do not know ; at any rate they think well of themselves, and no doubt they have cause to do so.

Moreover, they all were very kind to me, and their primitive ways amused me, as soon as they had settled that I was a foreigner, equally beyond and below inquiry. They told me that I was kindly welcome to stay there as long as it pleased me; and knowing how fond I was of making pictures, after beholding my drawing-book, every farmer among them gave me leave to come into his fields, though he never had heard there was anything there worth painting.

When once there has been a deposit of idea in the calm deep eocene of British rural mind, the impression will outlast any shallow deluge of the noblest education. Shoxford had settled two points for ever, without troubling Reason to come out of her way—first, that I was a foreign young lady of good birth, manners, and money ; second, and far more important, I was

here to write and paint a book about Shoxford. Not for the money, of that I had no need (according to the congress at the 'Silver-edged Holly'), but for the praise, and the knowledge of it like, and to make a talk among high people. But the elders shook their heads—as I heard from Mr. Rigg, who hugged his knowledge proudly, and uttered dim sayings of wisdom let forth at large usury: he did not mind telling me that the old men shook their heads, for fear of my being a deal too young, and a long sight too well favoured (as any man might tell without his specks on), for to write any book upon any subject yet, leave alone an old, ancient town like theirs. However, there might be no harm in my trying, and perhaps the schoolmaster would cross out the bad language.

Thus for once fortune now was giving me good help, enabling me to go about freely, and preventing (so far as I could see at least) all danger of discovery by my unknown foe. So here I resolved to keep my head-quarters, dispensing, if it must be so, with Betsy's presence,

and not even having Mrs. Price to succeed her, unless my cousin should insist upon it. And partly to dissuade him from that, and partly to hear his opinion of the sexton's tale, I paid a flying visit to Lord Castlewood; while 'Madam Straw,' as Betsy now was called throughout the village, remained behind at Shoxford. For I long had desired to know a thing which I had not ventured to ask my cousin—though I did ask Mr. Shovelin—whether my father had entrusted him with the key of his own mysterious acts. I scarcely knew whether it was proper even now to put this question to Lord Castlewood; but, even without doing so, I might get at the answer by watching him closely while I told my tale. Not a letter had reached me since I came to Shoxford, neither had I written any, except one to Uncle Sam; and, keeping to this excellent rule, I arrived at Castlewood without notice.

In doing this I took no liberty, because full permission had been given me about it; and indeed I had been expected there, as Stixon told me, some days before. He added that his

master was about as usual, but had shown some uneasiness on my account; though the butler was all in the dark about it, and felt it very hard after all these years, 'particular, when he could hardly help thinking that Mrs. Price—a new hand compared to himself, not to speak of being a female—knowed all about it, and were very aggravating. But there, he would say no more; he knew his place; and he always had been valued in it, long afore Mrs. Price come up to the bottom of his waistcoat.'

My cousin received me with kindly warmth, and kissed me gently on the forehead. 'My dear, how very well you look!' he said. 'Your native air has agreed with you. I was getting, in my quiet way, rather sedulous and self-reproachful about you. But you would have your own way, like a young American, and it seems that you were right.'

'It was quite right,' I answered, with a hearty kiss, for I never could be cold-natured; and this was my only one of near kin, so far at least as my knowledge went. 'I was quite

right in going; and I have done good. At any rate, I have found out something—something that may not be of any kind of use; but still it makes me hope things.'

With that, in as few words as ever I could use, I told Lord Castlewood the whole of Jacob's tale, particularly looking at him, all the while I spoke, to settle in my own mind whether the idea of such a thing was new to him. Concerning that, however, I could make out nothing. My cousin, at his time of life, and after so much travelling, had much too large a share of mind, and long skill of experience, for me to make anything out of his face beyond his own intention. And whether he had suspicion or not of anything at all like what I was describing, or anybody having to do with it, was more than I ever might have known, if I had not gathered up my courage and put the question outright to him. I told him that if I was wrong in asking, he was not to answer; but, right or wrong, ask him I must.

'The question is natural and not at all improper,' replied Lord Castlewood, standing a

moment for change of pain, which was all his relief. 'Indeed, I expected you to ask me that before. But, Erema, I have also had to ask myself about it, whether I have any right to answer you. And I have decided not to do so, unless you will pledge yourself to one thing.'

'I will pledge myself to anything,' I answered rashly; 'I do not care what it is, if only to get at the bottom of this mystery.'

'I scarcely think you will hold good to your words, when you hear what you have to promise. The condition upon which I tell you what I believe to be the cause of all, is that you let things remain as they are, and keep silence for ever about them.'

'Oh, you cannot be so cruel, so atrocious!' I cried in my bitter disappointment. 'What good would it be for me to know things thus, and let the vile wrong continue? Surely you are not bound to lay on me a condition so impossible?'

'After much consideration, and strong wish to have it otherwise, I have concluded that I am so bound.'

'In duty to my father, or the family, or what? Forgive me for asking, but it does seem so hard.'

'It seems hard, my dear, and it is hard as well,' he answered very gently, yet showing in his eyes and lips no chance of any yielding. 'But remember that I do not know, I only guess the secret; and if you give the pledge I speak of, you merely follow in your father's steps.'

'Never,' I replied, with as firm a face as his. 'It may have been my father's duty, or no doubt he thought it so; but it cannot be mine, unless I make it so by laying it on my honour. And I will not do that.'

'Perhaps you are right; but, at any rate, remember that I have not tried to persuade you. I wish to do what is for your happiness, Erema. And I think that, on the whole, with your vigour and high spirit, you are better as you are, than if you had a knowledge which you could only brood over and not use.'

'I will find out the whole of it myself,' I cried, for I could not repress all excitement;

'and then I need not brood over it, but may have it out and get justice. In the wildest parts of America justice comes with perseverance: am I to abjure it in the heart of England? Lord Castlewood, which is first—justice or honour?'

'My cousin, you are fond of asking questions difficult to answer. Justice and honour nearly always go together. When they do otherwise, honour stands foremost, with people of good birth at least.'

'Then I will be a person of very bad birth. If they come into conflict in my life, as almost everything seems to do, my first thought shall be of justice; and honour shall come in as its ornament afterwards.'

'Erema,' said my cousin, 'your meaning is good, and, at your time of life, you can scarcely be expected to take a dispassionate view of things.'

At first I felt almost as if I could hate a dispassionate view of things.' Things are made to arouse our passion, so long as meanness and villany prevail; and if old men, knowing the

balance of the world, can contemplate them all 'dispassionately,' more clearly than anything else, to my mind, that proves the beauty of being young. I am sure that I never was hot or violent—qualities which I especially dislike—but still I would rather almost have those than be too philosophical. And, now, while I revered my father's cousin for his gentleness, wisdom, and long-suffering, I almost longed to fly back to the Major, prejudiced, peppery, and red-hot for justice, at any rate in all things that concerned himself.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

SOME ANSWER TO IT.

Hasty indignation did not drive me to hot action. A quiet talk with Mrs. Price, as soon as my cousin's bad hour arrived, was quite enough to bring me back to a sense of my own misgovernment. Moreover, the evening clouds were darkening for a night of thunder, while the silver Thames looked nothing more than a leaden pipe down the valleys. Calm words fall, at such times, on quick temper, like the drip of trees on people who have been dancing. I shivered, as my spirit fell, to think of my weak excitement, and poor petulance to a kind, wise friend, a man of many sorrows and perpetual affliction. And then I recalled what I had observed, but in my haste forgotten—Lord Castlewood was greatly changed even in the short time since I had left his house for Shox-

ford. Pale he had always been, and his features (calm as they were, and finely cut) seemed almost bleached by indoor life and continual endurance. But now they showed worse sign than this—a delicate transparence of faint colour, and a waxen surface, such as I had seen at a time I cannot bear to think of. Also he had tottered forward, while he tried for steadfast footing, quite as if his worried members were almost worn out at last.

Mrs. Price took me up quite sharply—at least for one of her well-trained style—when I ventured to ask if she had noticed this, which made me feel uneasy. 'Oh dear, no!' she said, looking up from the lace-frilled pockets of her silk apron, which appeared to my mind perhaps a little too smart, and almost of a vulgar tincture; and I think that she saw in my eyes that much, and was vexed with herself for not changing it—'Oh dear, no, Miss Castlewood! We who know and watch him should detect any difference of that nature at the moment of its occurrence. His lordship's health goes vacillating; a little up now, and then a

little down, like a needle that is mounted to show the dip of compass; and it varies according to the electricity, as well as the magnetic influence.'

'What doctor told you that?' I asked, seeing in a moment that this housekeeper was dealing in a quotation.

'You are very'—she was going to say 'rude,' but knew better when she saw me waiting for it—'well, you are rather brusque, as we used to call it abroad, Miss Castlewood; but am I incapable of observing for myself?'

'I never implied that,' was my answer; 'I believe that you are most intelligent, and fit to nurse my cousin, as you are to keep his house. And what you have said shows the clearness of your memory and expression.'

'You are very good to speak so,' she answered, recovering her temper beautifully, but, like a true woman, resolved not to let me know anything more about it. 'Oh, what a clap of thunder! Are you timid? This house has been struck three times, they say. It stands so prominently. It is this that has made my lord look so.'

'Let us hope, then, to see him much better to-morrow,' I said very bravely, though frightened at heart, being always a coward at thunder. 'What are these storms you get in England compared to the tropical outbursts? Let us open the window, if you please, and watch it.'

'I hear myself called,' Mrs. Price exclaimed; 'I am sorry to leave you, Miss. You know best. But please not to sit by an open window. Nothing is more dangerous.'

'Except a great bunch of steel keys,' I replied; and gazing at her nice retreating figure, saw it quickened, as a flash of lightning passed, with the effort of both hands to be quit of something.

The storm was dreadful; and I kept the window shut, but could not help watching, with a fearful joy, the many-fingered hazy pale vibrations, the reflections of the levin in the hollow of the land. And sadly I began to think of Uncle Sam, and all his goodness; and how in a storm, a thousandfold of this, he went down his valley in the torrent of the waves, and must

have been drowned, and perhaps never found again, if he had not been wearing his leathern apron.

This made me humble, as all great thoughts do, and the sidelong drizzle in among the heavy rain (from the bigs drops jostling each other in the air, and dashing out splashes of difference) gave me an idea of the sort of thing I was—and how very little more. And, feeling rather lonely in the turn that things had taken, I rang the bell for somebody, and up came Stixon.

'Lor, Miss! Lor, what a burning shame of Prick!—"Prick" we call her, in our genial moments, hearing as the "k" is hard in Celtic language; and all abroad about her husband. My very first saying to you was, not to be too much okkipied with her. Look at the pinafore on her! Lord be with me! If his lordship, as caught me, that day of this very same month fifty years, in the gooseberry bush——'

'To be sure!' I said, knowing that story by heart, together with all its embellishments; 'but things are altered since that day. Nothing can be more to your credit, I am sure, than to

be able to tell such a tale in the very place where it happened.'

'But Miss—Miss Erma; I ain't begun to tell it.'

'Because you remember that I am acquainted with it. A thing so remarkable is not to be forgotten. Now, let me ask you a question of importance; and I beg you, as an old servant of this family, to answer it carefully and truly. Do you remember any one, either here or elsewhere, so like my father, Captain Castlewood, as to be taken for him at first sight, until a difference of expression and of walk was noticed?'

Mr. Stixon looked at me with some surprise, and then began to think profoundly, and in doing so he supported his chin with one hand.

'Let me see—like the Captain?' He reflected slowly: 'Did I ever see a gentleman like poor Master George—as was? A gentleman, of course, it must have been—and a very tall, handsome, straight gentleman, to be taken anyhow for young Master George. And he must have been very like him, too, to be taken for him by

resemblance. Well then, Miss, to the best of my judgment, I never did see such a gentleman.'

'I don't know whether it was a gentleman or not,' I answered, with some impatience at his tantalising slowness; 'but he carried his chin stretched forth—like this.'

For Stixon's own attitude had reminded me of a little point in Jacob Rigg's description, which otherwise might have escaped me.

'Lor' now, and he carried his chin like that!' resumed the butler, with an increase of intelligence by no means superfluous. 'Why, let me see now, let me see. Something do come across my mind when you puts out your purty chin, Miss—but there, it must have been a score of years agone, or more—perhaps five-and-twenty. What a daft old codger I be getting, surely! No wonder them new lights puts a bushel over me.'

'No,' I replied; 'you are simply showing great power of memory, Stixon. And now please to tell me, as soon as you can, who it was—a tall man, remember, and a handsome

one, with dark hair perhaps, or, at any rate, dark eyes—who resembled (perhaps not very closely, but still enough to mislead at a distance) my dear father—Master George, as you call him; for whose sake you are bound to tell me everything you know. Now try to think—do please try your very best for my sake.'

'That I will, Miss; that I will, with all my heart, with all my mind, with all my soul, and with all my strength, as I used to have to say, with my hands behind my back, afore education were invented. Only please you to stand with your chin put out, Miss, and your profield towards me. That is what brings it up, and nothing else at all, Miss. Only, not to say a word of any sort to hurry me. A treacherous and a deep thing is the memory and the remembrance.'

Mr. Stixon's memory was so deep that there seemed to be no bottom to it, or, at any rate, what lay there took a very long time to get at. And I waited with more impatience than hope the utterance of his researches.

'I got it now; I got it all, Miss, clear as any

pictur'!' the old man cried out, at the very moment when I was about to say 'Please to leave off; I am sure it is too much for you.' 'Not a pictur' in all of our gallery, Miss, two and fifty of 'em, so clear as I see that there man, dark as it was, and a heavy wind a blowing. What you call them things, Miss, if you please, as comes with the sun, like a face upon the water? Wicked things done again the will of the Lord, and He makes them fade out afterwards.'

'Perhaps you mean photographs. Is that the word?'

'The very word, and no mistake. A sinful trespass on the works of God, to tickle the vanity of gals. But he never spread himself abroad like them. They shows all their earrings, and their necks, and smiles. But he never would have shown his nose, if he could help it, that stormy night when I come to do my duty. He come into this house without so much as a 'by your leave' to nobody, and vexed me terrible accordingly. It was in the old lord's time, you know, Miss, a one of the true sort, as would have things respectful,

and knock down any man as soon as look. And it put me quite upon the touch-and-go, being responsible for all the footman's works, and a young boy promoted in the face of my opinion, having my own son worth a dozen of him. This made me look at the nature of things, Miss, and find it on my conscience to be after everybody.'

'Yes, Stixon, yes! Now do go on. You must always have been, not only after, but a very long way after everybody.'

'Miss Erma, if you throw me out, every word goes promiscuous. In a heffort of the mind like this it is every word, or no word. Now, did I see him come along the big passage—a 'currydoor' they call it now, though no more curry in it than there is door? No, I never seed him come along the passage, and that made it more reproachful. He come out of a green baize door—the very place I can point out to you, and the self-same door, Miss, though false to the accuracy of the mind that knows it, by reason of having been covered up red, and all the brass buttons lost to it in them

new-fangled upholsteries. Not that I see him come through, if you please, but the sway of the door, being double jointed, was enough to show legs had been there. And knowing that my lord's private room was there made me put out my legs quite wonderful.'

'Oh, do please to put out your words half as quickly.'

'No, Miss, no. I were lissome in those days, though not so very stiff at this time of speaking, and bound to be guarded in the guidance of the tongue. And now, Miss, I think if you please to hear the rest to-morrow, I could tell it better.'

A more outrageous idea than this was never presented to me. Even if I could have have tried to wait, this dreadful old man might have made up his mind not to open his lips in the morning; or, if he would speak, there might be nothing left to say. His memory was nursed up now, and my only chance was to keep it so. Therefore I begged him to please to go on, and no more would I interrupt him. And I longed to be ten years older, so as not to speak when needless.

'So then, Miss Erma, if I must go on,' resumed the well-coaxed Stixon, 'if my duty to the family driveth me to an 'arrowing subjeck, no words can more justly tell what come to pass than my language to my wife. She were alive then, the poor dear hangel, and the mother of seven children, which made me, by your leave comparing humble roofs with grandeur, a little stiff to him upstairs, as come in on the top of seven. For I said to my wife, when I went home—sleeping out of the house, you see, Miss, till the Lord was pleased to dissolve matrimony—"Polly," I said, when I took home my supper, "you may take my word for it there is something queer." Not another word did I mean to tell her, as behoved my dooty. Howsoever, no peace was my lot till I made a clean bosom of it, only putting her first on the Testament, and even that not safe with most of them. And from that night not a soul has heard a word till it comes to you, Miss. He come striding along, with his face muffled up, for all the world like a bugglar, and no more heed did he pay to me than if I was one of the

pedestals. But I were in front of him at the door, and to slip out so was against all orders. So in front of him I stands, with my hand upon the handles, and meaning to have a word with him, to know who he was, and such like, and how he comes there, and what he had been seeking, with the spoons, and the forks, and the gravies on my mind. And right I would have been in a court of law (if the lawyers was put out of it) for my hefforts in that situation. And then, what you think he done, Miss? So far from entering into any conversation with me, like a man—which would have done good to think of—he send out one hand to the bottom of my vest—as they call it now in all the best livery tailors—and afore I could reason on it, there I was a lying on a star in six colours of marble. When I come to think on it, it was but a push directed to a part of my system, and not a hit under the belt, the like of which no Briton would think of delivering. Nevertheless, there was no differ in what came to me, Miss, and my spirit was roused, as if I had been hit foul by one of the prizemen. No time to get

up, but I let out one foot at his long legs as a' was slipping through the door; and so nearly did I fetch him over that he let go his muffle to balance himself with the jamb, and the same moment a strong rush of wind laid bare the whole of his wicked face to me. For a bad wicked face it was, as ever I did see; whether by reason of the kick I give, and a splinter in the shin, or by habit of the mind, a proud, and 'aughty, and owdacious face, and, as I said to my poor wife, reminded me a little of our Master George; not in his ordinary aspect, to be sure, but as Master George might look if he was going to the devil. Pray excoose me, Miss, for bad words, but no good ones will do justice. And so off he goes, after one look at me on the ground, not worth considering, with his chin stuck up, as if the air was not good enough to be breathed perpendiklar like.'

'And of course you followed him?' I exclaimed, perceiving that Stixon would allow me now to speak. 'Without any delay you went after him?'

'Miss Erma, you forget what my dooty was.

My dooty was to stay by the door and make it fast, as custodian of all this mansion. No little coorosity, or private resentment, could 'a borne me out in doing so. As an outraged man I was up for rushing out; but as a trusted official, and responsible head-footman, Miss—for I were not butler till nine months after that—my dooty was to put the big bolt in.'

'And you did it, without even looking out, to see if he tried to set the house on fire! Oh, Stixon, I fear that you were frightened.'

'Now, Miss Erma, I calls it ungrateful, after all my hefforts to obleege you, to put a bad construction upon me. You hurts me, Miss, in my tenderest parts, as I never thought Master George's darter would 'a doed. But there, they be none of them as they used to be! Master George would 'a said, if he ever had heard it, "Stixon, my man, you have acted for the best, and showed a sound discretion. Stixon," he would have said, "here's George and Dragon in reward of your gallant conduck." Ah, that sort of manliness is died out now!'

This grated at first upon my feelings, because

it seemed tainted with selfishness, and it did not entirely agree with my own recollections of my father. But still Mr. Stixon must have suffered severely in that conflict, and to blame him for not showing rashness was to misunderstand his position. And so, before putting any other questions to him, I felt in my pocket for a new half-sovereign, which I hoped would answer.

Mr. Stixon received it in an absent manner, as if he were still in the struggle of his story, and too full of duty to be thankful. Yet I saw that he did not quite realise the truth of a nobly philosophic proverb—'the half is more than the whole.' Nevertheless, he stowed away his half, in harmony with a good old English saying.

'Now, when your were able to get up at last,' I inquired, with tender interest, 'what did you see, and what did you do, and what conclusion did you come to?'

'I come to the conclusion, Miss, that I were hurt considerable. Coorosity on my part were quenched by the way as I had to rub myself. But a man is a man; and the last thing to com-

plain of is the exercise of his functions. And when I come round I went off to his lordship, as if I had heared his bell ring. All of us knew better than to speak till him beginning, for he were not what they now call "halfable," but very much to the contrary. So he says, "You door-skulker, what do you want there?" And I see that he got his hot leg up, certain to fly to bad language. According, I asked, with my breath in my hand, if he pleased to see any young man there just now, by reason that such likes had been observated going out in some direction. But his lordship roared to me to go in another direction, not fit for young ladies. My old lord was up to every word of English; but his present lordship is the hopposite extreme.'

'Is that all you have to tell me, Stixon! Did you never see that fearful man again? Did you never even hear of him?'

'Never, Miss, never! And to nobody but you have I ever told all as I told now. But you seems to be born to hear it all.'

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A WITCH.

It was true enough that Stixon now had nothing more to tell, but what he had told already seemed of very great importance, confirming strongly, as it did, the description given me by Jacob Rigg. And even the butler's concluding words—that I seemed born to hear it all—comforted me like some good omen, and cheered me forward to make them true. Not that I could, in my sad and dangerous enterprise, always be confident. Some little spirit I must have had, and some resolve to be faithful, according to the power of a very common mind, admiring but never claiming courage. For I never did feel in any kind of way any gift of inspiration, or even the fitness of a quick strong mind for working out deeds of justice. There were many good ladies in America then

and now there are some in England, perceiving so clearly their own superiority as to run about largely proclaiming it. How often I longed to be a little more like these, equal to men in achievements of the body, and very far beyond them in questions of the mind!

However, it was useless to regret my lacks, and foolish, perhaps, to think of them. To do my very best with what little gifts I had was more to the purpose, and more sensible. Taking in lonely perplexity now this dim yet exciting view of things, I resolved, right or wrong, to abide at the place where the only chance was of pursuing my search. I was pledged, as perhaps has been said before, to keep from every one excepting faithful Betsy, and above all from Lord Castlewood, the unexpected little tale wrung out of Mr. Stixon. That promise had been given without any thought, in my eagerness to hear everything, and probably some people would have thought of it no more. But the trusty butler was so scared when I asked him to release me from it, so penitent also at his own indiscretion, which

never would have overcome him (as he said in the morning) only for the thunderstorm, that, instead of getting off, I was quite obliged to renew and confirm my assurances.

Therefore, in truth, I had no chance left but to go back to Shoxford and do my best, meeting all dark perils with the shield of right spread over me. And a great thing now in my favour was to feel some confidence again in the guidance of kind Wisdom. The sense of this never had abandoned me so much as to make me miserable about it; but still I had never tried to shelter under it, and stay there faithfully, as the best of people do. And even now I was not brought to such a happy attitude, although delivered by these little gleams of light from the dark void of fatalism, into which so many bitter blows had once been driving me.

However, before setting off again I made one more attempt upon Lord Castlewood, longing to know whether his suspicions would help me at all to identify the figure which had frightened both the sexton and the butler. That the person was one and the same I did

not for a moment call in question, any more than I doubted that he was the man upon whose head rested the blood of us. But why he should be allowed to go scot free while another bore his brand, and many others died for him, and why all my most just and righteous efforts to discover him should receive, if not discouragement, at any rate most lukewarm aid—these and several other questions were as dark as ever.

'You must not return to Shoxford, my cousin,' Lord Castlewood said to me that day, after a plain though courteous refusal to enlighten me even with a mere surmise, except upon the condition before rejected. 'I cannot allow you to be there without strict supervision and protection. You will not, perhaps, be aware of it, as perhaps you have not been before; but a careful watch will be kept on you. I merely tell you this that you may not make mistakes, and confound friendly vigilance with the spying of an enemy. Erema, you will be looked after.'

I could not help being grateful for his kind-

ness, and really, try as I might to be fearless, it would be a great comfort to have some one to protect me. On the other hand, how would this bear upon my own freedom of looking about, my desire to make my own occasions, and the need of going everywhere? Could these be kept to my liking at all while an unknown power lay in kind regard of me? Considering these things, I begged my cousin to leave me to my own devices, for that I was afraid of nobody on earth while only seeking justice, and that England must be worse than the worst parts of America if any harm to me could be apprehended at quiet times and in such a quiet place.

My cousin said no more upon that point, though I felt that he was not in any way convinced; but he told me that he thought I should pay a little visit, if only for a day, such as I treated him with, to my good friends at Bruntsea, before I returned to Shoxford. There was no one now at Bruntsea whom I might not wish to meet, as he knew by a trifling accident; and after all the kind services rendered by

Major and Mrs. Hockin, it was hardly right to let them begin to feel themselves neglected. Now the very same thing had occurred to me, and I was going to propose it; and many things which I found it hard to do without were left in my little chest of locked-up drawers there. But of that, to my knowledge, I scarcely thought twice; whereas I longed to see and have a talk with dear 'Aunt Mary.' Now, since my affairs had been growing so strange, and Lord Castlewood had come forward—not strongly, but still quite enough to speak of—there had been a kind-hearted and genuine wish at Bruntsea to recover me. And this desire had unreasonably grown while starved with disappointment. The less they heard of me the more they imagined in their rich good-will, and the surer they became that, after all, there was something in my ideas.

But how could I know this without any letters from them, since letters were a luxury forbidden me at Shoxford? I knew it through one of the simplest and commonest of all nature's arrangements. Stixon's boy, as every-

body called him (though he must have been close upon five-and-twenty, and carried a cane out of sight of the windows), being so considered, and treated boyishly by the maids of Castlewood, asserted his dignity, and rose above his value as much as he had lain below it, by showing that he owned a tender heart to them that did not despise it. For he chanced to be walking with his cane upon the beach (the very morning after he first went to Bruntsea, too late for any train back again), and casting glances of interior wonder over the unaccustomed sea—when from the sea itself out leaped a wondrous rosy deity.

'You there, Mr. Stixon! Oh my! How long?' exclaimed Mrs. Hockin's new parlour-maid, ready to drop, though in full print now, on the landward steps of the bathing machine set up by the reckless Major.

'Come this very hinstant, Miss, honour bright!' replied the junior Stixon, who had moved in good society: 'and just in the hackmy of time, Miss, if I may offer you my 'umble hand.'

The fair nymph fixed him with a penetra-

ting gaze through tresses full of salt curliness; while her cheeks were conscious of an unclad dip. But William Stixon's eyes were firm with pure truth, gently toning into shy reproach and tenderness. He had met her at supper last night, and done his best; but (as he said to the Castlewood maids) it was only feeling then, whereas now it was emoshun.

'Then you are a gentleman!' Polly Hopkins cried; 'and indeed, Mr. Stixon, these are slippery things.' She was speaking of the steps, as she came down them, and they had no hand-rails; and the young man felt himself to be no more Stixon's boy, but a gentleman under sweet refining pressure.

From that hour forth it was pronounced—and they left the world to its own opinion—that they were keeping company; and although they were sixty miles apart by air, and eighty-two by railway, at every post their hearts were one, with considerable benefit to the United Kingdom's revenue. Also they met by the sad sea waves, when the bathing-machines had been hauled up—for the Major now had three of

them—as often as Stixon senior smiled—which he did whenever he was not put out—on the bygone ways of these children. For Polly Hopkins had a hundred pounds, as well as being the only child of the man who kept the only shop for pickled pork in Bruntsea. And my Mr. Stixon could always contrive to get orders from his lordship, to send the boy away, with his carriage paid, when his health demanded bathing. Hence it is manifest that the deeds and thoughts of Bruntsea House, otherwise called 'Bruntlands,' were known quite as well, and discussed even better—because dispassionately—at Castlewood than and as they were at home.

Now I won for ever the heart of Stixon's boy, and that of Polly Hopkins, by recoiling with horror from the thought of going to Bruntsea unattended. After all my solitary journeys, this might have been called hypocrisy, if it had been inconvenient; but, coming as it did, it was pronounced by all who desired either news or love to be another proof of the goodness of my heart.

Escorted thus by William Stixon (armed with a brilliant cane bought for this occasion), and knowing that Sir Montague Hockin was not there, I arrived at Bruntlands in the afternoon, and received a kindly welcome from my dear friend, Mrs. Hockin. Her husband was from home, and she grieved to say that now he generally was; but nobody else could have any idea what his avocations were! Then she paid me some compliments on my appearance—a thing that I never thought of, except when I came to a question of likeness, or chanced to be thinking of things, coming up as they will, at a looking-glass.

That the Major was out was a truth established in my mind some time ago; because I had seen him, as our fly crawled by, expressly and emphatically at work, on a rampart of his own designing. The work was quite new to me; but not so his figure. Though I could not see people three miles off, as Firm Gundry was said to do, I had pretty clear sight, and could not mistake the Major within a furlong. And there he was, going about in a row of

square notches against the sea-line, with his coat off, and brandishing some tool, vehemently carrying on to spirits less active than his own. I burned with desire to go and join him, for I love to see activity; but Mrs. Hockin thought that I had better stay away, because it was impossible to get on there without language too strong for young ladies.

This closed the question, and I stopped with her, and found the best comfort that I ever could have dreamed of. 'Aunt Mary' was so steadfast, and so built up with, or rather built of, the very faith itself, that to talk with her was as good as reading the noblest chapter of the Bible. She put by all possibility of doubt as to the modern interference of the Lord, with such a sweet pity and the seasoned smile of age, and so much feeling (which would have been contempt, if she had not been softened by her own escapes), that really I, who had come expecting to set her beautiful white hair on end, became like a little child put into the corner, but too young yet for any other punishment at school, except to be looked at. Nevertheless,

though I did look small, it made me all the happier. I seemed to become less an individual, and more a member of a large kind race under paternal management. From a practical point of view this may have been amiss, but it helped to support me afterwards. And before I began to get weary or rebel against her gentle teaching, in came her husband; and she stopped at once, because he had never any time for it.

'My geological hammer!' cried the Major, being in a rush, as usual. 'Oh, Miss Castlewood! I did not see you. Pardon me! It is the want of practice only; so wholly have you deserted us. Fallen into better hands, of course. Well, how are you? But I need not ask. If ever there was a young lady who looked well—don't tell me of troubles, or worries, or nerves—I put up my glasses, and simply say, 'Pretty young ladies are above all pity!' My hammer, dear Mary; my hammer I must have. The geological one, you know; we have come on a bit of old Roman work; the bricklayers' hammers go flat, like lead. I have just one minute and a half to spare. What fine fellows those Ro-

mans were! I will build like a Roman. See to every bit of it myself, Erema. No contractor's jobs for me. Mary, you know where to find it.'

'Well, dear, I think that you had it last to get the bung out of the beer-barrel, when the stool broke down in the corner, you know, because you would——'

'Never mind about that. The drayman made a fool of himself. I proceeded upon true principles. That fellow knew nothing of leverage.'

'Well, dear, of course you understand it best. But he told cook that it was quite a mercy that you got off without a broken leg; and compared with that, two gallons of spilled ale——' Mrs. Hockin made off, without finishing her sentence.

'What a woman she is!' cried the Major; 'she takes such a lofty view of things, and she can always find my tools. Erema, after dinner I must have a talk with you. There is something going on here—on my manor—which I cannot at all get a clue to, except by connect-

ing you with it, the Lord knows how. Of course, you have nothing to do with it; but still, my life has been so free from mystery, that, that—you know what I mean——'

'That you naturally think I must be at the bottom of everything mysterious. Now, is there anything dark about me? Do I not labour to get at the light? Have I kept from your knowledge any single thing? But you never cared to go into them.'

'It is hardly fair of you to say that. The fact is that you, of your own accord, have chosen other counsellors. Have you heard any more of your late guardian, Mr. Shovelin? I suppose that his executor, or some one appointed by him, is now your legal guardian.'

'I have not even asked what the law is,' I replied; 'Lord Castlewood is my proper guardian, according to all common sense; and I mean to have him so. He has inquired through his solicitors as to Mr. Shovelin; and I am quite free there. My father's will is quite good, they say; but it never has been proved, and none of them care to do it. My cousin

thinks that I could compel them to prove it, or to renounce in proper form ; but Mr. Shovelin's sons are not nice people—as different from him as night from day, careless, and wild, and dashing.'

'Then do you mean to do nothing about it? What a time she is finding that hammer!'

'I leave it entirely to my cousin ; and he is waiting for legal advice. I wish to have the will, of course, for the sake of my dear father ; but, with or without any will, my mother's little property comes to me. And if my dear father had nothing to leave, why should we run up a great lawyer's bill?'

'To be sure not! I see. That makes all the difference. I admire your common sense,' said the Major—'but there! Come and look, and just exercise it here. There is that very strange woman again, just at the end of my new road! She stands quite still ; and then stares about, sometimes for an hour together. Nobody knows who she is, or why she came. She has taken a tumble-down house on my manor, from a wretch of a fellow who denies my title ; and

what she lives on is more than anyone can tell, for she never spends sixpence in Bruntsea. Some think that she walks in the dark to Newport, and gets all her food at some ship-stores there. And one of our fishermen vows that he met her walking on the sea, as he rowed home one night, and she had a long red bag on her shoulder. She is a witch, that is certain; for she won't answer me, however politely I accost her. But the oddest thing of all is the name she gave to the fellow she took the house from. What do you think she called herself? Of all things in the world—"Mrs. Castlewood!" I congratulate you on your relative.'

'How very strange!' I answered. 'Oh, now I see why you connected me with it; and I beg your pardon for having been vexed. But let me go and see her. Oh, may I go at once, if you please, and speak to her?'

'The very thing I wish, if you are not afraid. I will come with you, when I get my hammer. Oh, here it is! Mary, how clever you are! Now look out of the window, and you shall see Erema make up to her grandmamma.'

CHAPTER XXXIX.

NOT AT HOME.

Mrs. Hockin, however, had not the pleasure promised her by the facetious Major of seeing me 'make up to my grandmamma.' For although we set off at once to catch the strange woman who had roused so much curiosity, and though, as we passed the door of Bruntlands, we saw her still at her post in the valley, like Major Hockin's new letter-box, for some reason best known to herself we could not see any more of her. For, hurry as he might upon other occasions, nothing would make the Major cut a corner of his winding 'drive,' when descending it with a visitor. He enjoyed every yard of its length, because it was his own at every step, and he counted his paces in an undertone, to be sure of the length, for perhaps the thousandth time. It was long enough in a

straight line, one would have thought, but he was not the one who thought so; and therefore he had doubled it by judicious windings, as if for the purpose of breaking the descent.

'Three hundred and twenty-one,' he said, as he came to a post, where he meant to have a lodge as soon as his wife would let him; 'now the old woman stands fifty-five yards on, at a spot where I mean to have an ornamental bridge, because our fine saline element runs up there when the new moon is in perigee. My dear, I am a little out of breath, which affects my sight for the moment. Doubtless that is why I do not see her.'

'If I may offer an opinion,' I said, 'in my ignorance of all the changes you have made, the reason why we do not see her may be that she is gone out of sight.'

'Impossible!' Major Hockin cried, 'simply impossible, Erema. She never moves for an hour-and-a-half. And she was not come, was she, when you came by?'

'I will not be certain,' I answered; 'but I think that I must have seen her if she had been

there, because I was looking about particularly at all your works as we came by.'

'Then she must be there still; let us tackle her.'

This was easier said than done, for we found no sign of anybody at the place where she certainly had been standing less than five minutes ago. We stood at the very end and last corner of the ancient river trough, where a little seam went inland from it, as if some trifle of a brook had stolen down while it found a good river to welcome it. But now there was only a little oozy gloss from the gleam of the sun upon some lees of marshy brine left among the rushes by the last high tide.

'You see my new road and the key to my intentions?' said the Major, forgetting all about his witch, and flourishing his geological hammer, while standing thus at his 'nucleus.' 'To understand all, you have only to stand here. You see those levelling posts, adjusted with scientific accuracy. You see all those angles, calculated with micrometric precision. You see how the curves are radiated——'

'It is very beautiful, I have no doubt; but you cannot have Uncle Sam's gift of machinery. And do you understand every bit of it yourself?'

'Erema, not a jot of it. I like to talk about it freely when I can, because I see all its beauties. But as to understanding it, my dear —you might set to, if you were an educated female, and deliver me a lecture upon my own plan. Intellect is, in such matters, a bubble. I know good bricks, good mortar, and good foundations.'

'With your great ability, you must do that,' I answered, very gently, being touched with his humility, and allowance of my opinion; 'you will make a noble town of it. But when is the railway coming?'

'Not yet. We have first to get our Act; and a miserable-minded wretch, who owns nothing but a rabbit-warren, means to oppose it. Don't let us talk of him. It puts one out of patience when a man cannot see his own interest. But come and see our assembly-rooms, literary institute, baths, &c. &c.—that is what we are urging forward now.'

'But may I not go first and look for my strange namesake? Would it be wrong of me to call upon her?'

'No harm whatever,' replied my companion; 'likewise no good. Call fifty times, but you will get no answer. However, it is not a very great round, and you will understand my plans more clearly. Step out, my dear, as if you had got a troop of Mexicans after you. Ah, what a fine turn for that lot now!' He was thinking of the war which had broken out, and the battle of Bull's Run.

Without any such headlong speed we soon came to the dwelling-place of the stranger, and really for once the good Major had not much overdone his description. Truly it was almost tumbling down, though massively built and a good house long ago; and it looked the more miserable now from being placed in a hollow of the ground, whose slopes were tufted with rushes, and thistles, and ragwort. The lower windows were blocked up from within, the upper were shattered and crumbling, and dangerous, with blocks of cracked stone jutting

over them; and the last surviving chimney gave less smoke than a workman's homeward whiff of his pipe to comfort and relieve the air.

The only door that we could see was of heavy black oak, without any knocker, but I clenched my hand, having thick gloves on, and made what I thought a very creditable knock, while the Major stood by, with his blue lights up, and keenly gazed and gently smiled.

'Knock again, my dear,' he said; 'you don't knock half hard enough.'

I knocked again with all my might, and got a bruised hand for a fortnight, but there was not even the momentary content produced by an active echo. The door was as dead as everything else.

'Now for my hammer,' my companion cried; 'this house, in all sound law, is my own. I will have a "John Doe and Richard Roe"—a fine action of ejectment. Shall I be barred out upon my own manor?'

With hot indignation he swung his hammer, but nothing came of it except more noise. Then the Major grew warm and angry.

'My charter contains the right of burning witches or drowning them, according to their colour. The execution is specially imposed upon the bailiff of this ancient town, and he is my own pickled-pork man. His name is Hopkins, and I will have him out with his seal, and stick, and all the rest. Am I to be laughed at in this way?'

For we thought we heard a little screech of laughter from the loneliness of the deep, dark place, but no other answer came, and perhaps it was only our own imagining.

'Is there no other door?—perhaps one at the back?' I asked, as the lord of the manor stamped.

'No, that has been walled up long ago. The villain has defied me from the very first. Well, we shall see. This is all very fine. You witness that they deny the owner entrance?'

'Undoubtedly I can depose to that. But we must not waste your valuable time.'

'After all, the poor ruin is worthless,' he went on, calming down as we retired; 'it must be levelled, and that hole filled up. It is quite

an eyesore to our new parade. And no doubt it belongs to me, no doubt it does. The fellow who claims it was turned out of the law. Fancy any man turned out of the law. Erema, in all your far-west experience, did you ever see a man bad enough to be turned out of the law?'

'Major Hockin, how can I tell? But I fear that their practice was very, very sad—they very nearly always used to hang them.'

'The best use—the best use a rogue can be put to. Some big thief has put it the opposite way, because he was afraid of his own turn. The constitution must be upheld, and, by the Lord, it shall be—at any rate, in East Bruntsea. West Bruntsea is all a small-pox warren out of my control, and a skewer in my flesh. And some of my tenants have gone across the line to snap their dirty hands at me.'

Being once in this cue, Major Hockin went on, not talking to me much, but rather to himself, though expecting me now and then to say 'yes;' and this I did when necessary, for his principles of action were beyond all challenge, and the only question was how he carried them out.

He took me to his rampart, which was sure to stop the sea, and at the same time to afford the finest place in all Great Britain for a view of it. Even an invalid might sit here in perfect shelter from the heaviest gale, and watch such billows as were not to be seen except upon the Major's property.

'The reason of that is quite simple,' he said, 'and a child may see the force of it. In no other part of the kingdom can you find so steep a beach fronting the south-west winds, which are ten to one of all other winds, without any break of sand or rock outside. Hence we have what you cannot have on a shallow shore, grand rollers: straight from the very Atlantic, Erema; you and I have seen them. You may see by the map that they all end here, with the wind in the proper quarter.'

'Oh, please not to talk of such horrors,' I said; 'why your ramparts would go like pie-crust.'

The Major smiled a superior smile, and after more talk we went home to dinner.

From something more than mere curiosity

I waited at Bruntsea for a day or two, hoping to see that strange namesake of mine who had shown so much inhospitality. For she must have been at home when we made that pressing call, inasmuch as there was no other place to hide her within the needful distance of the spot where she had stood. But the longer I waited the less would she come out—to borrow the good Irishman's expression—and the Major's pillar-box, her favourite resort, was left in conspicuous solitude. And when a letter came from Sir Montague Hockin, asking leave to be at Bruntlands on the following evening, I packed up my goods with all haste and set off, not an hour too soon, for Shoxford.

But before taking leave of these kind friends I begged them to do for me one little thing, without asking me to explain my reason, which indeed was more than I could do. I begged them, not of course to watch Sir Montague, for that they could not well do to a guest, but simply to keep their eyes open and prepared for any sign of intercourse, if such there were, between this gentleman and that

strange interloper. Major Hockin stared, and his wife looked at me as if my poor mind must have gone astray, and even to myself my own thought appeared absurd. Remembering, however, what Sir Montague had said, and other little things as well, I did not laugh as they did. But perhaps one part of my conduct was not right, though the wrong (if any) had been done before that: to wit, I had faithfully promised Mrs. Price not to say a word at Bruntlands about their visitor's low and sinful treachery towards my cousin. To give such a promise had perhaps been wrong, but still without it I should have heard nothing of matters that concerned me nearly. And now it seemed almost worse to keep than to break such a pledge, when I thought of a pious, pure-minded, and holy-hearted woman, like my dear 'Aunt Mary,' unwittingly brought into friendly contact with a man of the lowest nature. And as for the Major, instead of sitting down with such a man to dinner, what would he have done but drive him straightway from the door, and chase him

to the utmost verge of his manor with the peak-end of his 'geological hammer?'

However, away I went without a word against that contemptible and base man, towards whom—though he never had injured me—I cherished for my poor cousin's sake the implacable hatred of virtuous youth. And a wild idea had occurred to me (as many wild ideas did now in the crowd of things gathering round me) that this strange woman, concealed from the world, yet keenly watching some members of it, might be that fallen and miserable creature who had fled from a good man with a bad one, because he was more like herself—Flittamore, Lady Castlewood. Not that she could be an 'old woman' yet, but she might look old, either by disguise, or through her own wickedness; and everybody knows how suddenly those southern beauties fall off, alike in face and figure. Mrs. Price had not told me what became of her, or even whether she was dead or alive, but merely said, with a meaning look, that she was 'punished' for her sin, and I had

not ventured to inquire how, the subject being so distasteful.

To my great surprise and uneasiness as well, I had found at Bruntlands no letter whatever, either to the Major or myself, from Uncle Sam or any other person at the Saw-mills. There had not been time for any answer to my letter of some two months back, yet being alarmed by the Sawyer's last tidings, I longed with some terror for later news. And all the United Kingdom was now watching with tender interest the dismemberment, as it almost appeared, of the other mighty Union. Not with malice or snug satisfaction, as the men of the North in their agony said; but certainly without any proper anguish yet, and rather as a genial and sprightly spectator, whose love of fairplay perhaps kindles his applause of the spirit and skill of the weaker side. 'Tis a good fight—let them fight it out!' seemed to be the general sentiment; but in spite of some American vaunt and menace (which of late years had been galling) every true Englishman deeply

would have mourned the humiliation of his kindred.

In this anxiety for news I begged that my letters might be forwarded under cover to the postmistress at Shoxford, and bearing my initials. For now I had made up my mind to let Mrs. Busk know whatever I could tell her. I had found her a cross and well-educated woman, far above her neighbours, and determined to remain so. Gossip, that universal leveller, theoretically she despised; and she had that magnificent esteem for rank which works so beautifully in England. And now when my good nurse reasonably said, that much as she loved to be with me, her business would allow that delight no longer, and it also came home to my own mind that money would be running short again, and small hope left in this dreadful civil war of our nugget escaping pillage (which made me shudder horribly at internal discord), I just did this—I dismissed Betsy, or rather I let her dismiss herself, which she might not have altogether meant to do, although she threatened it so often. For here she had no-

thing to do but live well, and protest against tricks of her own profession which she practised as necessary laws at home; and so, with much affection, for the time we parted.

Mrs. Busk was delighted at her departure; for she never had liked to be criticised so keenly while she was doing her very best. And as soon as the wheels of Betsy's fly had shown their last spoke at the corner, she told me with a smile that her mind had been made up to give us notice that very evening to seek for better lodgings. But she could not wish for a quieter, pleasanter, or more easily pleased young lady than I was without any mischief-maker; and so, on the spur of the moment, I took her into my own room, while her little girl minded the shop, and there and then I told her who I was and what I wanted.

And now she behaved most admirably. Instead of expressing surprise, she assured me that all along she had felt there was something, and that I must be somebody. Lovely as my paintings were (which I never heard, before or since, from any impartial censor), she had

known that it could not be that alone which had kept me so long in their happy valley. And now she did hope I would do her the honour to stay beneath her humble roof, though entitled to one so different. And was the fairy ring in the churchyard made of all my family?

I replied that too surely this was so, and that nothing would please me better than to find, according to my stature, room to sleep inside it as soon as ever I should have solved the mystery of its origin. At the moment this was no exaggeration, so depressing was the sense of fighting against the unknown so long, with scarcely any one to stand by me or avenge me if I fell. And Betsy's departure, though I tried to take it mildly, had left me with a readiness to catch my breath.

But to dwell upon sadness no more than need be (a need as sure as hunger), it was manifest now to my wandering mind that once more I had chanced upon a good, and warm, and steadfast heart. Everybody is said to be born, whether that happens by night or day,

with a certain little widowed star, which has lost its previous mortal, concentrating from a billion billion of miles, or leagues, or larger measure, intense, but generally invisible radiance upon him or her; and to take for the moment this old fable as of serious meaning, my star was to find bad facts at a glance, but no bad folk without long gaze.

CHAPTER XL.

THE MAN AT LAST.

This new alliance with Mrs. Busk not only refreshed my courage, but helped me forward most importantly. In truth, if it had not been for this, I never could have borne what I had to bear, and met the perils which I had to meet. For I had the confidence of feeling now that here was some one close at hand, an intelligent person, and well acquainted with the place and neighbourhood, upon whom I could rely for warning, succour, and, if the worst should come to the very worst, revenge. It is true that already I had Jacob Rigg, and perhaps the protector promised by my cousin, but the former was as ignorant as he was honest, and of the latter, as he made no sign, how could I tell anything?

Above all things, Mrs. Busk's position, as

mistress of the letters, gave me very great advantage both for offence and defence. For without the smallest breach of duty or of loyal honour she could see that my letters passed direct to me or from me, as the case might be, at the same time that she was bound to observe all epistles addressed to strangers or new-comers in her district, which extended throughout the valley. And by putting my letters in the Portsmouth bag, instead of that for Winchester, I could freely correspond with any of my friends without any one seeing name or postmark in the neighbouring villages.

It is needless to say that I had long since explored, and examined with great diligence, that lonely spot where my grandfather met his terrible and mysterious fate. Not that there seemed to be any hope now, after almost nineteen years, of finding even any token of the crime committed there. Only that it was natural for me, feeling great horror of this place, to keep hovering about it frequently.

For this I had good opportunity, because the timid people of the valley, towards the

close of day, would rather trudge another half-mile of the homeward road than save brave legs at the thumping cost of hearts not so courageous. For the planks were now called 'Murder-bridge;' and everybody knew that the red spots on it, which could never be seen by daylight, began to gleam towards the hour of the deed, and glowed (as if they would burn the wood) when the church clock struck eleven.

This phenomenon was beyond my gifts of observation; and knowing that my poor grandfather had scarcely set foot on the bridge, if ever he set foot there at all—which at present was very doubtful—also that he had fallen backward, and only bled internally, I could not reconcile tradition (however recent) with proven truth. And sure of no disturbance from the step of any native, here I often sat in a little bowered shelter of my own, well established up the rise, down which the path made zig-zag, and screened from that and the bridge as well by sheaf of twigs and lop of leaves. It was a little forward thicket, quite detached from the upland copse, to which perhaps it had once

belonged, and crusted up from the meadow slope with sod and mould in alternate steps. And being quite the elbow of a foreland of the meadow-reach, it yielded almost a 'birdseye view' of the beautiful glade and the wandering brook.

One evening, when I was sitting here, neither drawing, nor working, nor even thinking with any set purpose, but idly allowing my mind to rove, like the rivulet, without any heed, I became aware of a moving figure in the valley. At first it did not appear to me as a thing at all worth notice; it might be a very straightforward cow or a horse, coming on like a stalking horse, keeping hind legs strictly behind, in direct desire of water. I had often seen those sweet things that enjoy four legs walking in the line of distance as if they were no better off than we are, kindly desiring, perhaps, to make the biped spectator content with himself. And I was content to admire this cow, or horse, or whatever it might be, without any more than could be helped of that invidious feeling which has driven the human race now to establish its

right to a tail and its hope of four legs. So little, indeed, did I think of what I saw, that when among the hazel twigs, parted carelessly by my hand, a cluster of nuts hung manifest, I gathered it, and began to crack and eat, although they were scarcely ripe yet.

But while employed in this pleasant way I happened to glance again through my leafy screen, and then I distinguished the figure in the distance as that of a man walking rapidly. He was coming down the mill-stream meadow towards the wooden bridge, carrying a fishing-rod, but clearly not intent on angling. For, instead of following the course of the stream, he was keeping quite away from it, avoiding also the footpath, or at any rate seeming to prefer the long shadows of the trees and the tufted places. This made me look at him, and very soon I shrank into my nest and watched him.

As he came nearer any one could tell that he was no village workman, bolder than the rest, and venturesome to cross the 'Murder-bridge' in his haste to be at home. The

fishing-rod alone was enough to show this when it came into clearer view; for our good people, though they fished sometimes, only used rough rods of their own making, without any varnish or brass thing for the line. And the man was of different height, and walk, and dress, from any of our natives.

'Who can he be?' I whispered to myself, as my heart began to beat heavily, and then seemed almost to stop, as it answered—'this is the man who was in the churchyard.' Ignoble as it was, and contemptible, and vile, and traitorous to all duty, my first thought was about my own escape; for I felt that if this man saw me there he would rush up the hill and murder me. Within pistol-shot of the very place where my grandfather had been murdered—a lonely place, an unholy spot, and I was looking at the hand that did it.

The thought of this made me tremble so, though well aware that my death might ensue from a twig on the rustle or a leaf upon the flutter, that my chance of making off unseen was gone ere I could seize it. For now the

man was taking long strides over the worn-out planks of the bridge, disdaining the handrail, and looking upward, as if to shun sight of the footing. Advancing thus, he must have had his gaze point-blank upon my lair of leafage; but, luckily for me, there was gorse upon the ridge, and bracken, and rag-thistles, so that none could spy up and through the footing of my lurking-place. But, if any person could have spied me, this man was the one to do it. So carefully did he scan the distance and inspect the foreground, as if he were resolved that no eye should be upon him while he was doing what he came to do. And he even drew forth a little double telescope, such as are called 'binoculars,' and fixed it on the thicket which hid me from him, and then on some other dark places.

No effort would compose or hush the heavy beating of my heart; my lips were stiffened with dread of loud breath, and all power of motion left me. For even a puff of wind might betray me, the ruffle of a spray, or the lifting of a leaf, or the random bounce of a beetle.

Great peril had encompassed me ere now, but never had it grasped me as this did, and paralysed all the powers of my body. Rather would I have stood in the midst of a score of Mexican rovers than thus in the presence of that one man. And yet was not this the very thing for which I had waited, longed, and laboured? I scorned myself for this craven loss of nerve, but that did not enable me to help it. In this benumbed horror I durst not even peep at the doings of my enemy; but presently I became aware that he had moved from the end of the planks (where he stood for some time as calmly as if he had done nothing there), and had passed round the back of the hawthorn tree, and gone down to the place where the body was found, and was making most narrow and minute search there. And now I could watch him without much danger, standing as I did well above him, while his eyes were steadfastly bent downward. And, not content with eyesight only, he seemed to be feeling every blade of grass or weed, every single stick or stone, craning into each cranny of the ground, and

probing every clod with his hands. Then, after vainly searching, with the very utmost care, all the space from the hawthorn trunk to the meadow-leet (which was dry as usual), he ran in a fury of impatience to his rod, which he had stuck into the bank, as now I saw, and drew off the butt-end, and removed the wheel, or whatever it is that holds the fishing-line; and this butt had a long spike to it, shining like a halberd in a picture.

This made me shudder; but my spirit was returning, and therewith my power of reasoning, and a deep stir of curiosity. After so many years, and such a quantity of searching, what could there still be left to seek for in this haunted and horrible place? And who was the man that was looking for it?

The latter question partly solved itself. It must be the murderer, and no other, whoever he might be among the many black spots of humanity. But as to the other point, no light could be thrown upon it, unless the search should be successful, and perhaps not even then. But now this anxiety, and shame of terror,

made me so bold—for I cannot call it brave—that I could not rest satisfied where I was, and instead of blessing every leaf and twig that hid me from the enemy, nothing would do for me but to creep nearer, in spite of that truculent long bright spike.

I thought of my father, and each fibre of my frame seemed to harden with vigour and fleetness. Every muscle of my body could be trusted now. I had always been remarkably light of foot. Could a man of that age catch me? It was almost as much as Firm Gundry could do, as in childish days I had proved to him. And this man, although his hair was not gray, must be on the slow side of fifty now, and perhaps getting short of his very wicked breath. Then I thought of poor Firm, and of good Uncle Sam, and how they scorned poltroonery; and, better still, I thought of that great Power which always had protected me—in a word, I resolved to risk it.

But I had not reckoned upon fire-arms, which such a scoundrel was pretty sure to have; and that idea struck cold upon my valour.

Nevertheless I would not turn back. With no more sound than a field-mouse makes in the building of its silken nest, and feet as light as the step of the wind upon the scarcely ruffled grass, I quitted my screen, and went gliding down a hedge, or rather the residue of some old hedge, which would shelter me a little towards the hollow of the banks. I passed low places, where the man must have seen me if he had happened to look up; but he was stooping with his back to me, and working in the hollow of the dry water-trough. He was digging with the long spike of his rod, and I heard the rattle of each pebble that he struck.

Before he stood up again, to ease his back, and to look at the ground which he still had to turn, I was kneeling behind a short close-branched holly, the very last bush of the hedgerow, scarcely fifteen yards from the hawthorn-tree. It was quite impossible to get nearer without coming face to face with him. And now I began again to tremble, but with a great effort conquered it.

The man was panting with his labour, and

seemed to be in a vile temper too. He did not swear, but made low noises full of disappointment. And then he caught up his tool, with a savage self-control, and fell to again.

Now was my time to see what he was like, and engrave him on my memory. But lo, in a moment I need not do that! The face was the bad image of my father's. A lowered, and vicious, and ill-bred image of a noble countenance—such as it was just possible to dream that my dear father's might have fallen to, if his mind and soul had plunged away from the good inborn and implanted in them. The figure was that of a tall strong man, with shoulders rather slouching, and a habit of keeping his head thrown back, which made a long chin look longer. Altogether he seemed a perilous foe, and perhaps a friend still more perilous.

Be he what he might, he was working very hard. Not one of all Uncle Sam's men, to my knowledge, least of all Martin, would have worked so hard. With his narrow and ill-adapted tool he contrived to turn over, in less than twenty minutes, the entire bed of the

meadow-leet, or trough, for a length of about ten yards. Then he came to the mouth, where the water of the main stream lapped back into it, and he turned up the bottom as far as he could reach, and waited for the mud he had raised to clear away. When this had flowed down with the stream, he walked in for some little distance till the pool grew deep, but in spite of all his labour—there was nothing.

Meanwhile the sunset-glow was failing, and a grey autumnal haze crept up the tranquil valley. Shadows waned and faded into dimness more diffuse; and light grew soft, and vague, and vaporous. The gleam of water, and the gloss of grass, and deep relief of trees, began to lose their several phase and mingle into one large twilight blend. And cattle, from their milking-sheds, came lowing for more pasture; and the bark of a shepherd's dog rang quick as if his sheep were drowsy.

In the midst of innocent sights and sounds, that murderer's heart misgave him. He left his vain quest off, and gazed, with fear and hate of nature's beauty, at the change from day to

night which had not waited for him. Some touch of his childhood moved him perhaps, some thought of times when he played 'I spy,' or listened to twilight ghost tales; at any rate, as he rose and faced the evening, he sighed heavily.

Then he strode away; and although he passed me almost within length of his rod, there was little fear of his discovering me, because his mind was elsewhere.

It will, perhaps, be confessed by all who are not as brave as lions, that so far I had acquitted myself pretty well in this trying matter. Horribly scared as I was at first, I had not allowed this to conquer me, but had even rushed into new jeopardy. But now the best part of my courage was spent; and when the tall stranger refixed his rod and calmly recrossed those ominous planks, I durst not set forth on the perilous errand of spying out his ways and tracking him. A glance was enough to show the impossibility in those long meadows of following without being seen, in this stage of the twilight. Moreover, my nerves had been tried

too long, and presence of mind could not last for ever. All I could do, therefore, was to creep as far as the trunk of the hawthorn tree, and thence observe that my enemy did not return by the way he had come, but hastened down the dusky valley.

One part of his labours has not been described, though doubtless a highly needful one. To erase the traces of his work, or at least obscure them to a careless eye: when he had turned as much ground as he thought it worth his while to meddle with, he trod it back again to its level, as nearly as might be, and then (with a can out of his fishing-basket) sluiced the place well with the water of the stream. This made it look to any heedless person who would not descend to examine it as if there had been nothing more than a little reflux from the river, caused by a flush from the mill-pond. This little stratagem increased my fear of a cunning and active villain.

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